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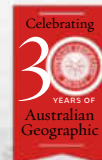
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TWENTY YEARS EXPLORING THE OUTDOORS

IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE it was five years ago that I first started as Editor of *AG Outdoor* – right when the magazine turned 15 years of age. Now, in what seems like a short blur of time that does prove the old adage of time flying when you're having fun, five years have passed and we're celebrating 20 years as the premier adventure magazine in Australia.

It's been an incredible ride; the magazine has maintained its prominence with readers and it has continued to sell strongly while also expanding into the digital realm with our awesome website, Facebook presence and digital edition. What is most satisfying though, is no matter how *AG Outdoor* is "delivered" to our readers in these changing and turbulent times for media, we've retained our true sense of what the magazine has always been about: getting our readers and their families into the outdoors and, simply, having a cracking good time.

My personal relationship with the magazine has covered all of those 20 years; firstly as a reader then, 12 years ago as a freelance contributor, before taking on the Editor's role in 2010. Snaring this gig was something that I still rate as a dream come true. Getting to write about, photograph and, most importantly, introduce our readers to all the outdoors

has to offer has been hugely satisfying for me – as has the correspondence from our super-loyal readers who share that spirit of exploration and adventure.

It is all too easy to rest on your laurels, however, and that is something that *AG Outdoor* will never do. We've continually looked at ways to improve the magazine, with the new (and very popular) paddling, cycling, road trip and MissAdventure sections part of our aim to ensure we stay as the go-to publication for all of those looking for inspiration.

To celebrate 20 years in this issue, we've put together a fantastic list of the 20 best one-day adventures. This big feature is a way of recognising that, as much as we'd all like to escape on that "big trip", it is not always possible. What is always possible though, is that one day of adventure, where you can explore, laugh and have fun in the Australian outdoors.

And that is what *AG Outdoor* will always be about: encouraging people of all ages to head outside and live the adventurous life. Here's to another 20 years!



On the cover. Great Ocean Walk, Vic.
// Mark Watson/Tourism Victoria

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The Nano-Air™ Jacket. Yet another reason to pack it. Sean Villanueva O'Driscoll and Nico Favresse on Ikerasak Peak in midnight light, Greenland. **BENJAMIN DITTO** © 2015 Patagonia, Inc.



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LETTER OF THE ISSUE

Our eight-year-old son, Charlie, picked up the July/Aug 2015 issue of *Outdoor* and yelled 'Hey Mum, Dad look what a cool magazine; it says "Wild in Tasmania", that was us!' On June 1 he set off with family and friends on an amazing winter traverse of the Overland Track. On the first day it snowed and snowed and snowed, however for a kid from the Snowy Mountains of NSW, this just seemed like part of the fun. So when everyone else was inside the hut at night sheltering from the cold, Charlie was out doing snow angels and icicle sword fighting.

He now reads every issue of your magazine for future adventure ideas.

Thanks for providing inspiration to all ages to get outdoors and enjoy the elements no matter what the weather.

Claire Rogerson

Congratulations Claire, you've won an awesome The North Face Duffel bag (RRP\$170).



KEEPING OUR ATTENTION

At a time when it's so common for us to be glued to our screens reading short bursts of 140 characters, *Outdoor* consistently inspires me to get off the screen and get outside. Your article of short weekend trips has just given me fuel to get out after a long week of screenburn. Keep it up!

Andy Vincent

PURE INSPIRATION

Hey *Outdoor*.

Just wanting to let you guys know I love your work, and I read the mag all the time. I mostly rock-climb and trail-run. Climbing is not as big as most places but since reading your magazines from last year I have been on many trips around Australia seeing

more than most, thanks to you guys. And, I am about to go to Karijini to do some canyoning, and then after that, Tasmania for ice climbing. You guys have motivated me so much.

Dylan Smith

THE BIGGEST APPLE

It was great to see your big feature on Tassie-based adventures. I am biased, being from the Apple Isle myself, but this island state has everything an adventurous traveller could wish for. Whether it is hiking, mountain biking, climbing or paddling, we're just a couple of hours' flight away from most mainland cities. It was great to read this story – and the rest of the issue was brilliant too. Nice work, *Outdoor*!

Sally Fearnton



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NEPAL IS OPEN FOR BUSINESS



»»»» **POST EARTHQUAKE, NEPAL IS OPEN FOR BUSINESS.** It's important to the country that adventurers continue with their travel plans and forge new plans to help rebuild Nepal. Our 2015-16 trekking program is full steam ahead, including seven great Community Project Trips that, with World Expeditions Foundation funds and your help, centre around rebuilding two village schools. So, simply go trekking or trek-and-build to help Nepal get back on its feet. || **ORDER OUR BROCHURE ONLINE > SPEAK TO OUR EXPERTS NOW**

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Adventure Grant Update

AG OUTDOOR

The North Face/AG Outdoor Adventure Grant winner Jordan Searle is deep into preparations for his Grant adventure.

WORDS **LIL MERCANTI** PHOTOS **ARI WALKER/JORDY SEARLE**



JORDAN SEARLE, RECIPIENT of The North Face Adventure Grant presented by AG Outdoor, will be attempting a first descent in New Zealand later this year. But a successful expedition requires a reliable team, and Ari Walker will make up one of those members.

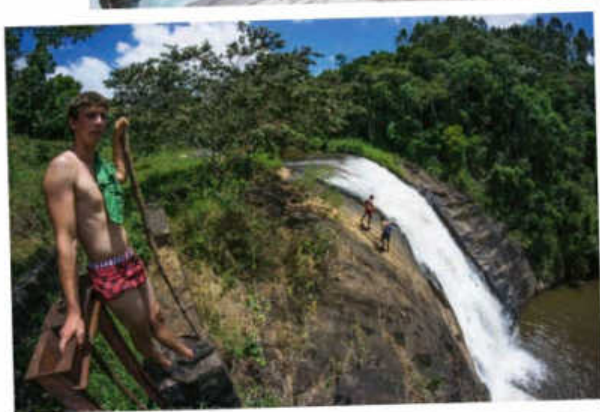
After meeting at the University of Canterbury, Jordan Searle and Ari Walker spent a lot of time paddling together. They have achieved first descents in New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Brazil. Keen travellers in their sport, they have been to Brazil, the United States, Canada and Norway thus far in 2015 - and it's only September.

Jordan Searle is excited to have Ari on the team for the expedition to take place later this year. 'In a lot of ways Ari and myself kayak in a similar fashion, as we both learnt and developed our skills on the rivers around Hokitika. These rivers are long, dangerous and require a good team to work them out - a perfect training ground to create well-rounded kayakers.

The main thing that Ari brings to the trip is reliability. It is important to have a crew you can depend on when paddling hard white water. Ari is familiar with the type of environment we will be in, its typical and not-so typical dangers and how to mitigate and/or deal with them.'

From Takaka, New Zealand, Ari Walker has been white water kayaking for about seven years. He will be joining Jordan Searle in the expedition to take place this November in New Zealand.

"I was first introduced to white water in my final year of high school, an outdoor education program and immediately realised my passion for the sport. My kayaking career however didn't really take off until I began university and joined the University of Canterbury Canoe Club (UCCC). Over the four years that followed, I transitioned from a learner to a volunteer



Top to bottom: Ari Walker negotiates Money Drop; Jody Searle sends it on the Waitaha River, NZ; Jordy Searle scouting in Espirito Santo.

instructor. It was here that I met many of my closest friends (including Jordan) with whom I began kayaking with all over New Zealand and all over the world."

Preparation for the expedition has already begun as Ari and Jordy make sure they are

paddling at the top of their game. To ensure this, they are paddling regularly on similar and challenging white water leading up to the expedition. Kayaking with the entire team prior to the expedition is also critical to ensure all facets of the group are functioning well together.

The North Face Adventure Grant is now open for applications for 2016. Have an expedition you want to get off the ground?

Check out www.thenorthfacegrant.com.au for full details now.

Riders at The Pioneer will get to ride a mix of trails through amazing scenery as they make their way from Christchurch to Queenstown.



Become a Pioneer!

New Zealand's all-new seven-day MTB stage race takes riders through the spectacular Southern Alps.

WORDS **AG OUTDOOR** PHOTOS **C/O THE PIONEER**

IT'S A DREAM WEEK of mountain biking: riding through New Zealand's amazing Southern Alps. The Pioneer MTB race is going to make that dream a reality for riders early in 2016, when this all-new, seven-day stage race kicks off Sunday, January 31, 2016 in Christchurch, before finishing on Saturday, February 6 in the popular adventure hotspot of Queenstown.

The Pioneer will take riders through some amazing landscapes, linking a series of previously inaccessible (private property) trails with NZ bike routes, including two of its famous Cycle Trails: the Alps to Ocean and Queenstown trails.

Organiser, Lagardere Oceania Unlimited, is quick to point out that The Pioneer is for riders of all skill levels, and the aim is to attract outdoor enthusiasts from all areas – walkers, bikers, climbers, etc., who have a reasonable fitness level and love riding their mountain bikes. For everyday mountain bikers, the big appeal is riding through the Southern Alps with friends (entry is via teams of two) and enjoying the hospitality of the eight host towns – Christchurch, Geraldine, Fairlie, Lake Tekapo, Lake



Ohau, Hawea, Snow Farm and Queenstown – along the way.

Lagardere Oceania Unlimited's CEO, Dave Beeche, came up with the original idea.

"I came up with the idea about two years ago. I had read a bit about the Cape Epic [in South Africa] and a friend had done the Tranzalps and I was really inspired by this type of challenge. When I learned that our head office used to deliver the Tranzalps,

that gave us the confidence to tackle a new challenge like this."

"My wife Tori came up with the name 'The Pioneer' while we were driving north one day talking about the essence of this event. Pioneer embodies the adventurous and exploration elements of this event.

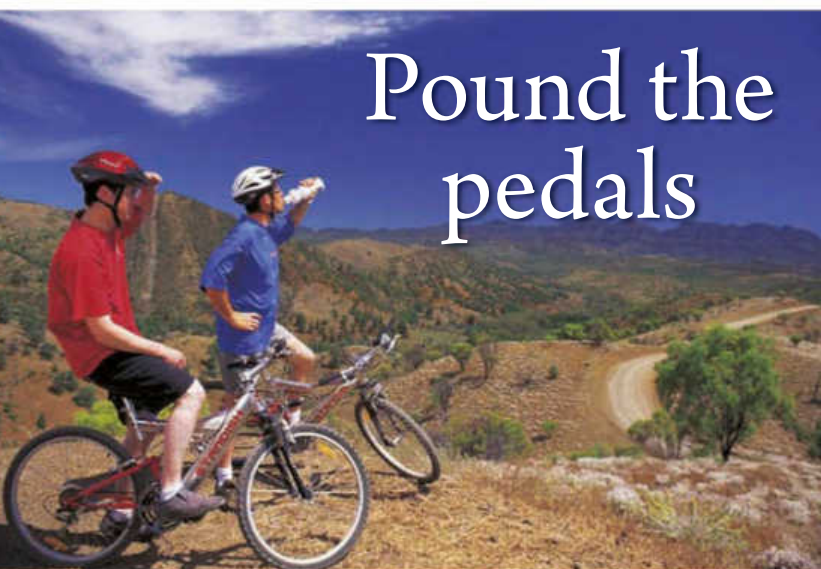
"This will appeal enormously to not only international visitors but also to New Zealanders of all abilities. There will be an elite division but this race is also about everyday New Zealanders who love mountain biking as a social event, to come and take part in a challenging but achievable event..."

It is the mountains, so there will be plenty of climbing – 15,057 metres, in fact, over the seven days – but what goes up, must come down, so the riders' hard work will always be rewarded with descending fun. The route is a mix of NZ Cycle Trails, Department of Conservation (DOC) trails, singletrack sections and farm tracks, with a lot of these sections through private property and only open for riders in the event – a fantastic privilege.

The Pioneer's entries will be capped at 1000, but those riders will get to not only ride awesome terrain, but be provided with plenty of support: The Pioneer is a full-service race – a race village will be set up at each overnight stop, with camp accommodation, fresh-cooked meals, bike cleaning/servicing, and more.

It is a definite bucket-list event. If you make it over there, you might even spot AG Outdoor Editor Justin Walker – he's put his hand up to ride.

For The Pioneer info – including a breakdown of each stage's course – go to www.thepioneer.co.nz



Pound the pedals

Bike events in spectacular locations are becoming a (welcome) theme around the world and the 2015 Flinders Ranges Outback epic Mountain Bike Race, on Saturday, October 24, is another example of this.

The event incorporates three races of varying distances – 64km, 109km and 205km – all of which follow some or all of the Flinders By Bike Circuit, which links beautiful Wilpena Pound with Gum Creek Station. Having the Flinders Ranges as the

backdrop as you ride is one of the big attractions of this event, offering a unique way to experience the South Australian outback while riding.

Each of the three races finishes at Wilpena Pound Resort, with 10.30pm the official cut-off time. The 64km race starts at Gum Creek Station at midday; the 109km will kick off at 10.30am from Willow Springs, and the full monty 205km starts at Gum Creek Station itself and links up with sections of the world-famous Mawson Trail. The 205km race starts at 6.30am so you will have plenty of time to finish the race and still enjoy your surroundings.

As well as the three “main” races that can be entered by individuals, there is a 205km relay team event

that allows riders to tackle shorter stages, such as the 25km Wilpena Pound-Rawnsley Park leg, or the 70km Rawnsley Park-Willow Springs section.

Jason Purton, Director of Sales and Marketing at Indigenous Business Australia (IBA), owners of Wilpena Pound Resort, said: “While these races may not be for the faint hearted, they are certainly a fantastic way to experience the stunning beauty of the landscape of Wilpena Pound, here in the heart of central South Australia.”

To enter the event, go to <http://www.eventstrategies.com.au/wp/flinders-ranges-outback-epic/entry/> and for more info on other outdoor activities in the Wilpena Pound area, go to www.wilpenapound.com.au



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Originator



Binary



Exodus



New The North Face Summit Series gear!

The North Face has expanded its high-end, technical Summit Series range of garments with the release of three new outer shells that utilise the company's unique FuseForm construction technology that was first seen on the Fuse Uno outer shell jacket (AG Outdoor has one of these on long-term review – check out our next issue for a comprehensive Gear Test report).

According to The North Face, "FuseForm construction allows for varying levels of tear strength all within the same fabric". As well, by only using one piece of fabric in the construction, TNF cuts down on waste material, while also ensuring the final product is not only reinforced and tougher in the parts it needs to be, but it also light in weight.

The FuseForm Originator jacket uses TNF's proprietary HyVent 2.5L lightweight fabric (with ripstop) to keep the weight down without sacrificing durability. The Originator is aimed at climbers (alpine, rock) and features a helmet-compatible hood (with laminated brim) that is easily adjusted via a single pull. It weighs an impressive 300g. RRP\$400

The Exodus jacket is a soft-shell that is, again, constructed of a single piece of material thanks to FuseForm tech, and includes a stretch-woven blend of materials – nylon outer for abrasion-resistance; polyester inner lining for next-to-skin comfort – and it is both windproof and highly breathable. Average weight is 420g, which is impressive for such a fully-featured soft-shell jacket. RRP\$280

The Binary has got the lightweight-junkies at AG Outdoor very excited; the feather-weight wind jacket weighs a paltry 80g in the smaller sizes (average weight across all sizes is 92g) and is super-compressible without sacrificing durability. The high-wear areas of the jacket are made with what TNF calls "high tenacity" nylon (20D nylon, as opposed to the 10D nylon used for the rest of the jacket) and the Binary is designed for rock climbing and mountaineering. It even fits in a zipped chest pocket that doubles as a stowing pouch when the Binary is not in use. Yep, we're keen to test one! RRP\$200

For more information on these and all other The North Face gear, see www.thenorthface.com.au

AWARD-WINNING THERMOBALL UPDATED



The North Face ThermoBall jacket has received multiple accolades since its release last year, including snaring one of AG Outdoor's Best Gear Awards in our 2014 Skills & Gear Guide. The company has since updated the ThermoBall range to include the new ThermoBall Hybrid Hoodie. Construction is a combination of 15D nylon ripstop with ThermoBall insulation, and lightweight soft-shell side and sleeve panels (featuring stretch material). Along with the exceptional warming characteristics, the Hybrid Hoodie includes a drop hood with bound opening, bound cuffs, zip pockets and is also stowable in a pocket. The average weight of the Hybrid Hoodie is 315g – not much of a load to carry for the warmth it provides. RRP\$280



AUSTRALIAN ADVENTURE FESTIVAL

Victoria's East Gippsland region is hosting the inaugural Australian Adventure Festival over the weekend of October 23-25. This all-encompassing festival will feature a number of events, such as 55km and half-marathon trail runs, 100km and 50km mountain bike races (as well as a kids' MTB event), a 40km or 14km

paddle race on the Gippsland Lakes, and your choice of either a one-day or two-day non-navigational adventure race challenge, where competitors will use MTBs, watercraft and trail running over a course that will be fun and challenging.

The varied landscape of East Gippsland – beaches, rivers, lakes, forests and mountains, as well as

some brilliant national parks – is the ideal destination for this new festival. The aim of this is to entice adventurous families to the region to celebrate all the outdoors has to offer, as well as sample some of the region's markets, culinary attractions and entertainment. Plus, you can always stay on an extra few days and explore other adventure activities in

the region, including the East Gippsland Rail Trail and paddling on the Gippsland Lakes – or maybe do some beach- or boat-based fishing.

In terms of matching activity to destination, the Australian Adventure Festival looks like it has the perfect match in East Gippsland.

For more information, go to <http://adventurefestival.com>



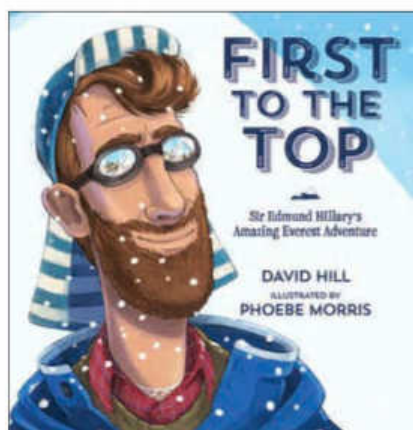
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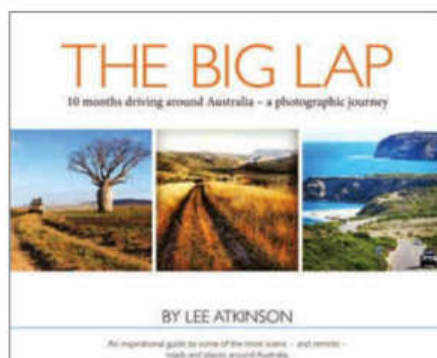


FIRST TO THE TOP

David Hill, Illustrator: Phoebe Morris

This book is the perfect way to introduce those young adventurers in the family to one of the world's incredible achievements. *First to the Top: Sir Edmund Hillary's Amazing Everest Adventure* uses illustrations and words to tell the story of the world's most famous bee-keeper and his quest to climb the world's tallest mountain.

\$25 www.penguin.com.au

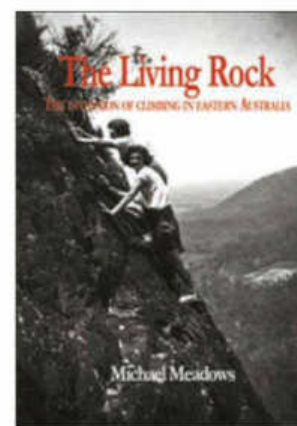


THE BIG LAP

Lee Atkinson

Experienced travel writer/photographer Lee Atkinson has lived our dreams by spending 10 months travelling 40,000km around Australia on the ultimate road trip. This pictorial diary includes myriad images with extended captions that help readers trace Atkinson's journey as the author camped at, and travelled to, a number of remote, out-of-the-way locations as part of her trip around this huge country. Read it and you'll be making plans for your own "Big Lap"!

\$35 www.leeatkinson.com.au or
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THE BIG ROCK

Michael Meadows

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Under Cover

You need to read the fine print when it comes to travel insurance.

WORDS AND PHOTOS **JAMES MCCORMACK**

It was in Utah a couple of years ago and on a day of glorious New Year powder, thigh deep and dry, when, thanks to an abrupt change in circumstances, three questions ran through my mind. The first was not 'have I broken any bones?', but rather, 'which bones have I broken?', because the change in circumstances was that the powder I had been skiing was no longer soft. Instead, I had slammed full tilt into a rock the size of minivan.

I had had not the slightest inkling of the rock. Hidden under the snow, the first I knew of it was the moment of impact. There had been no loss of control, no sense of impending doom or a train wreck about to happen; instead, it was rather like the manner in which a bug makes an acquaintance with your windscreen. My situation was perhaps not as dire as the aforementioned bug; nonetheless, unquestionably bones had

been broken. It was merely, as I have said, a matter of which ones.

The second question, when it became apparent that the answer to the first question was both arms, was, 'how am I going to wipe my bum?'

And the third question, given all I knew about the American healthcare system, was, 'is this going to send me broke?'

It turned out the second was far easier to answer than third, because after surgery and a couple of nights in hospital, the bills kept rolling in. It started at \$4000. That soon climbed to \$12,000... then \$17,000... then \$23,000.

But one question I did not need to ask was who would pay for it. I was insured. But most skiers in my situation would not have been, even if they'd taken out insurance, because I was off-piste. Now, you may think you've been all smart and organised



and prepared by forking out for travel insurance, and that that means you'll be covered. Chances are, however, it won't, as you'll find out if you delve down deep into all those tedious terms and conditions – it's here that you'll find several clauses that most travel insurance companies don't tend to highlight.

In most cases, those clauses are strict: no skiing. Full stop. Unless, that is, you pay extra for their specific winter sports coverage. But don't think that paying this additional premium is the end of the story, because a reading of the fine print reveals the majority of premiums only cover you on-piste. And unless you are a rank beginner, you're unlikely to stick solely to the trails when all the powder lies off them. Legally speaking – and trust me, if something actually happens to you, legalese is exactly the language insurance

companies will use with you – you could be just a few metres off-piste and you no longer have coverage.

True, a few insurers do allow off-piste, but again for most, you guessed it, there's a caveat: as long as you're with a professional guide. Yeah, right, you're gonna hire a guide to head over to those half-dozen untracked turns you've spied over in the trees?

The number of insurers who let you ski independently off-piste are very few indeed. And that's before you throw in the final hurdle: you want not only to head off-piste but to go beyond a resort's boundaries and into the backcountry. Independently, at that. Or you want to go heli-skiing. And now we are looking at very few companies indeed. In fact, a recent *google.com.au* search for "ski insurance" did not turn up one company in the first two pages of hits that actually covered you for all off-piste and backcountry skiing, even if you forked out extra for their so-called "snow packs". There were a couple that came close, but even then they had other conditions, like only covering you from mid-December until 31 March, or not covering search and rescues.

Just before I went on my trip to Utah, I'd been lucky/tenacious/pigheaded enough not to give in. I spent night after night wading through the Product Disclosure Statements of dozens of insurers, combing through the fine print. In short, I found just three who'll cover you for off-piste, backcountry and heli-skiing: QBE, IHI Bupa, and AAMI. But QBE requires you to purchase a winter

...but of the dozens I had checked out, AAMI was seriously head and shoulders above the rest.

Snow Pack to get coverage, and IHI Bupa – who I was with that day in Utah, and, I must say, were great – is technically not even necessarily travel insurance, because you can purchase their medical-only component.

The clear winner however is AAMI. For less than IHI's medical-only premium, AAMI's standard travel insurance will cover you. There's no need to purchase a special winter premium, and there are no caveats, and no tricky clauses. There's just one exception: that you're not engaging in competitive skiing.

So if you're heading over to chase Northern Hemisphere pow this upcoming winter, and you want to cover yourself from medical bills potentially taking your house, shirt, undies and every last item you have, save yourself a week of farting about trying to figure out which insurer will cover you and just start with AAMI. Now, perhaps some other equally favourable insurer exists that I haven't yet stumbled upon in my many nights of internet research, but of the dozens I had checked out, AAMI was seriously head and shoulders above the rest. It's rare in this day and age of competition that it can be so cut and dried.

Chamonix, France

Camera: NIKON D800

Lens: Zeiss Planar T 1.4/85 ZF.2

Shutter: 1/1600 sec

Aperture: f/3.2

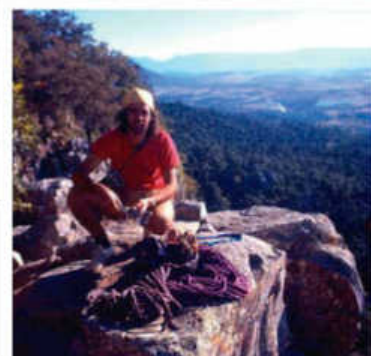
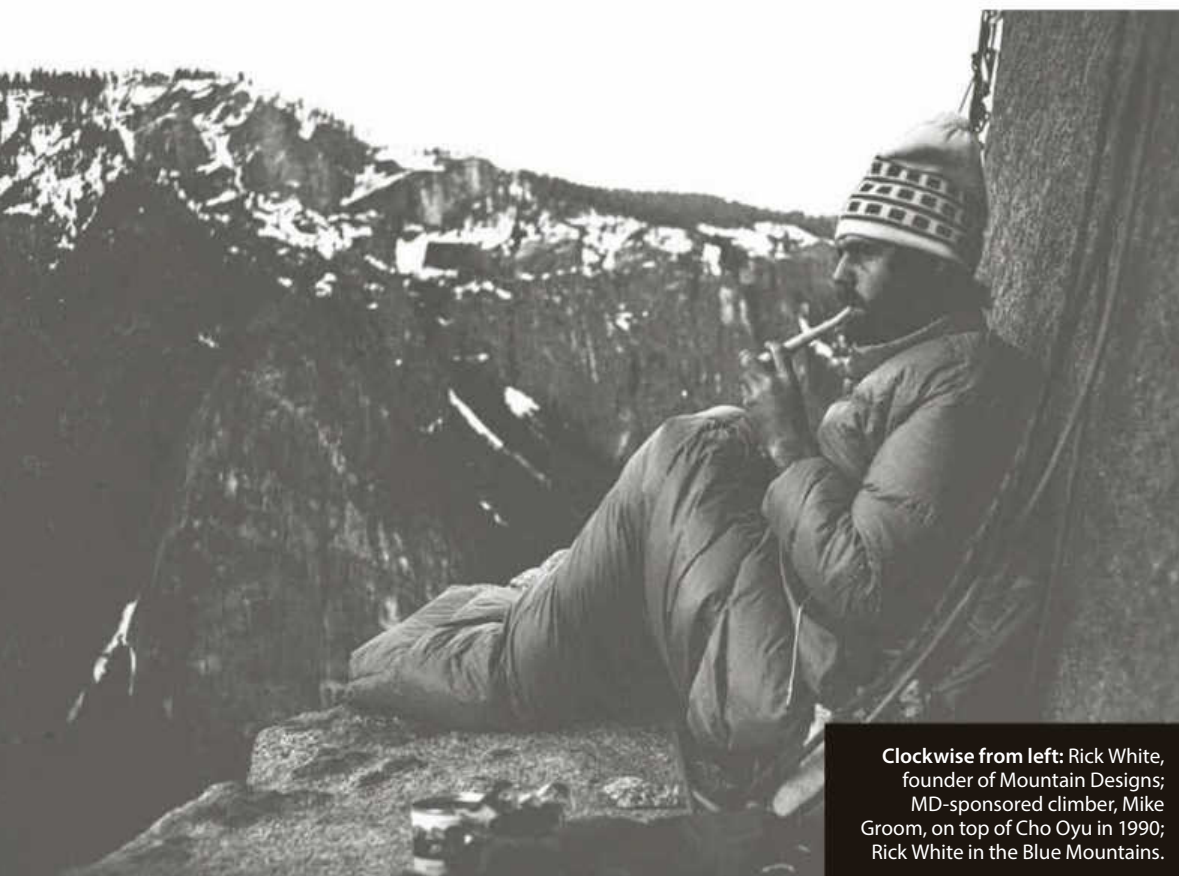
Photographer: Tim Kemple





NEVER STOP EXPLORING™





Clockwise from left: Rick White, founder of Mountain Designs; MD-sponsored climber, Mike Groom, on top of Cho Oyu in 1990; Rick White in the Blue Mountains.

Mountain Designs

WORDS **CAROLYN BARRY**

Few Australian outdoor brands have done as well as Mountain Designs, particularly when it comes to ones that have a broad range of products and the credibility to go with it. Celebrating its 40th anniversary this year, Mountain Designs has become a trusted brand for outdoor gear, all the while maintaining its Australian authenticity.

"Our 'heritage born of the mountains' philosophy has been the heart and soul of Mountain Designs for the past 40 years," says CEO Caroline Machado Campos.

The company is still headquartered in Brisbane, where it was founded in 1975 by rock climbing guru Rick White. Rick was a legend in the scene in the '60s and '70s, particularly in Queensland, with climbs like the solo ascent of Prometheus II on Tibrogargan – a Glasshouse Mountain peak now closed because it's considered too dangerous to climb. He was also part of the first Australian team to climb Yosemite's El Capitan in 1973; made the first unroped, solo ascent of Balls Pyramid (the

world's tallest sea stack), near Lord Howe Island (1979); and opened up the Frog Buttress climbing area south-west of Brisbane.

Rick combined his love of climbing with his technical skills (he worked for the CSIRO for a stint) to make gear that enabled climbers to get to the places they wanted. Like many outdoor brands of that era, Rick started out of a suitcase he kept under the sofa, initially concentrating on making jackets and sleeping bags, and importing climbing equipment. As the penchant for outdoor types to travel afield to more exotic locations grew in the '80s, so did the demand for gear to get there; and so did Mountain Designs. Today the brand has more than 300 staff and 39 stores across Australia.

Mountain Designs is credited with being a pioneer of technical outdoor gear, including introducing Australia (along with Paddy Pallin) to Gore-Tex and Polartec materials. Other innovations include advances in sleeping bag design, such as bringing the concept of the mummy-style bag Down Under. "One of our most famous

contributions to the outdoor industry was our development of the 'waterproof foot' construction for sleeping bags," says Caroline. "[It was] created in 1979 and still used across global outdoor brands today."

Rick continued his climbing quests, including an expedition to scale Mt Everest in 1991, with fellow Queensland mountaineer Michael Groom. The trip ended in disaster, and not of the usual alpine variety – Rick had to pull out of the expedition because a long-time financier of the company collapsed, almost ending Mountain Designs right then. While the brand survived, the enormous debts crippled Rick and he was forced to bow out of the company he created. Around that time Rick was also diagnosed with a muscle wasting disease that prevented him from doing any more climbing.

After a decade-long hiatus, Rick was welcomed back to Mountain Designs when Greg Nunn, still executive chairman, took over in 2001. One of Rick's goals at this time was to grow the Mountain Designs sponsorship program. In the Aussie alpine heydays of the 80s, Mountain Designs sponsored some of the biggest Australian mountaineering achievements to six of the world's highest mountains – including Tim McCartney-Snape and Greg Mortimer's 1984 first Australian ascent of Mt Everest. Rick took the sponsorship side of the brand into the modern age, with support for



FAST FACTS

PARENT COMPANY: Mountain Designs Holdings Pty Ltd

BASED IN: Brisbane, Qld

CLAIM TO FAME: Development of the 'waterproof foot' in sleeping bags

KNOWN FOR: Bringing mummy-style and toe-box sleeping bags to the Australian market; pioneering use of Gore-Tex and Polartec in Australia

KEY PRODUCTS: Mountaineer Sleeping Bag – The very first product to have a Mountain Designs logo; Pro- Elite Down Suit – Has summited all of the big mountains.

THE OTHER STUFF: Wherever possible Mountain Designs gear is uses Blue Sign approved fabric, global organic textile standard, OEKO-TEX® Standard and Fairtrade; they have a range down jackets made from recycled coffee beans

CAROLINE'S PICK: Delphine down travel trench – has sustainable coffee fibre, mixed in with the ethically sourced down

multisport and adventure racing.

Rick's health battles were not over, however, and in 2004, he died from a brain tumour. "Even though Rick White is no longer with us, his presence and influence still permeates throughout the company," says Caroline. "We are very proud of where we come from and of who we are now."

Continuing his legacy, Mountain Designs continues to support top amazing athletes. "We have contributed to encouraging those brave and fearless adventurers who look at a mountain and think 'How soon can I get to the top?'," says Caroline. "Mountain Designs has proudly sponsored... the youngest Australian, Alyssa Azar, in her last two attempts to get to the top of Everest, and we will be there with her for the third time as well." Mountain Designs has also more recently sponsored burns survivor and outdoor enthusiast Turia Pitt on her trek of the Inca Trail.

Over a time span of four decades, other companies have chopped and changed ownership, facing challenges of trying to stay true to their beginnings while still expanding and

beholden to parent companies. Mountain Designs has remained a private, Australian company and its stability has meant it's been able to concentrate on producing its own great products. "We have the gear for as soon as you step outside the door to the very top of the mountain and everything in between" says Caroline.

Like other successful brands, Mountain Designs has stayed on top of innovation, something that Caroline credits to its staff and commitment to service. "Primarily our strength lies in our team. We have such a passionate group of outdoor, adventure and travel enthusiasts who not only create our next product innovation but actively test and listen to our customers' feedback," she says. "We are always searching for the next smart technology globally to incorporate into our range, partnering with international leading fabric manufacturers, and often taking risks to ensure our products stay at the forefront of innovation."

The success of the brand comes down to two reasons, says Caroline: We never compromise on quality or comfort... and providing exceptional, knowledgeable service."

Mountain Equipment

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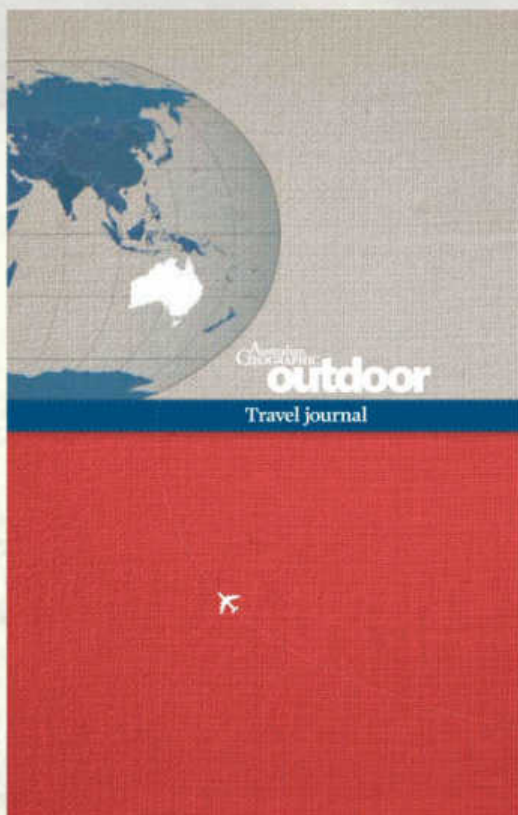
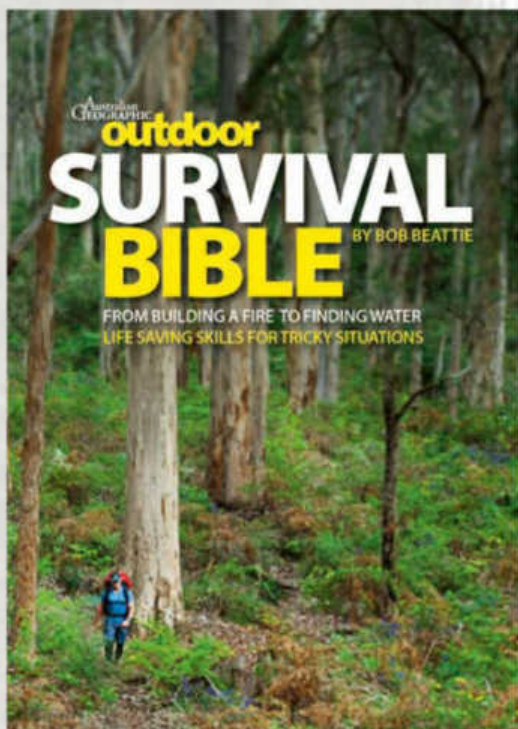
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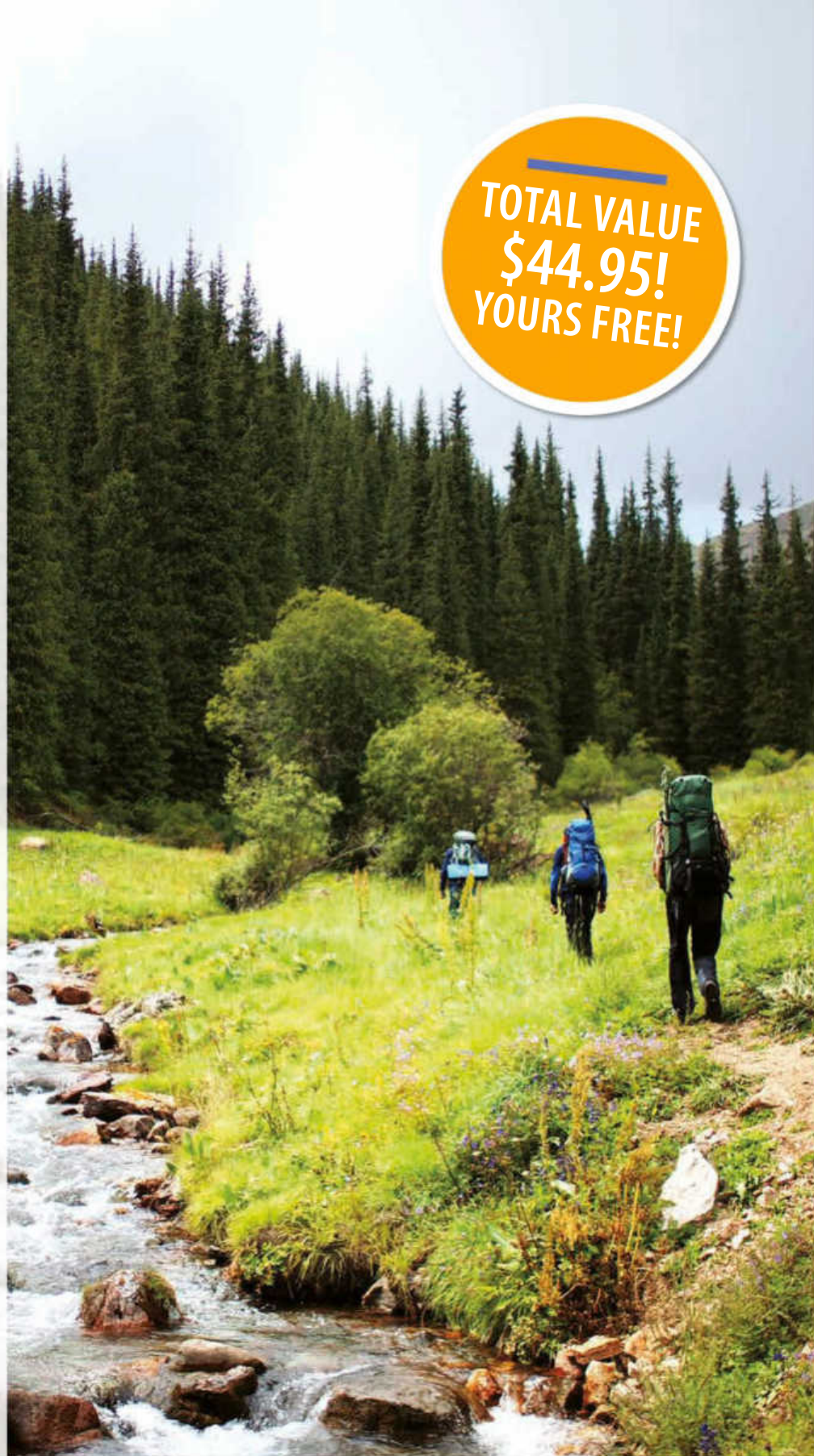
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Outdoor 20 Days of adventure One Perfect

How much adventure can you cram into 24 hours? More than you could ever dream. Here are 20 awesome hiking, paddling, camping and cycling one-day epics

CAMPING
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Day



PADDLING SNOWY RIVER, VIC/NSW

Info: www.riverguide.com.au/1-2-day-snowy-whitewater-trips.html

When to go: All year

1 The mighty Snowy is one of Australia's iconic whitewater journeys. For a one-day, family paddling adventure on this river, guided is the only option and we reckon Alpine River Adventures' one-day Snowy White-water Adventure – in cool inflatable kayaks (there are single or doubles available) – is the best way to go; the experienced guides know the area, all the big gear is taken care of (you just need to bring a few essentials) and the company will ferry you from/to Jindabyne (or you can meet them at the put-in point).

Being in the capable hands of experienced guides means paddlers can focus on enjoying the amazing surroundings; paddling the Byadbo Wilderness section of the Snowy means you will float past sections of rare white box and cypress pine timber, and get the chance to run rapids up to a Grade 3.

It's not all whitewater though; you will also paddle through plenty of flat sections, stop off halfway through the day for a nice riverside lunch, and experience a part of this country that few people will ever see. It's well worth taking a waterproof camera if you can: not only will you grab some fantastic paddling shots, but there is plenty of wildlife to spot along the river, including the shy and elusive platypus (Alpine River Adventures also runs a five-day platypus survey expedition on the river, plus other longer trips as well, including a two-day Snowy River run).

Talk to any keen paddler and "doing the Snowy" will be on their bucket list, so this one-day adventure will, potentially, give you bragging rights!

20th Anniversary Outdoor 20 Days of adventure



MTB CAIRNS, QLD

Info: www.ridecairns.com

When to go: February-October

2 Cairns is synonymous with the history of Australian mountain biking, having hosted the 1996 World Championships, a round of the UCI World Cup in 2014 (and it will again in 2016). It will also be the host city for the 2017 World Championships. So yeah, it won't be hard to find a great day of riding up here...

There are five different MTB destinations in and around Cairns, but we'd narrow it down to a choice of two. Option one is driving for an hour from Cairns, up onto the tablelands west of the city, to explore the 55km of trails in Atherton Forest Mountain Bike Park. Option two is even easier: barely 15 minutes from Cairns International Airport and you'll be at Smithfield Regional Park, the location of all those World Cup/Champs events and with 60km of trails (of all difficulty levels). Smithfield is rated as the best rainforest trail system in the world, with internationally-renowned (and Aussie) trail-building legend Glen Jacobs having a big hand in creating these singletrack wonders, so visiting riders will be spoilt for choice on whichever trails they ride.

Of course, along with sublime trails, both these networks boast fantastic scenery and vistas so a day out riding won't be just about the bikes – it will also be about experiencing some of Australia's most spectacular and unique landscapes.





3

Hiking

GREAT OCEAN WALK, VIC

Info: www.visitvictoria.com When to go: September-May

The Great Ocean Walk (GOW) is the perfect destination for day-adventurers. The reason: a number of sections of the GOW make ideal day walks (in fact, the walk was designed around easy day access for each section). Our recommendation would be either the 12km hike from Aire River to the lovely Johanna Beach (around five hours at a steady pace), or you could use Aire River as your end-point and walk to it from Cape Otway (10km and around four hours). The Aire River-Johanna Beach section takes walkers through some wild heathland as it shadows the coastline and there are plenty of ocean views to take in as well as loads of wildlife to spot.

The Cape Otway Lighthouse makes the perfect start-point for our second option and is worth checking out before hitting the track. This route from Cape Otway to Aire River also offers shorter return journeys – Rainbow Falls is 3km return from Cape Otway and is spectacular – but we'd recommend the full monty here as the variety of landscapes, ranging from cliffs to coastal vegetation to impressive sand dunes, makes for an awesome day's experience of the GOW.





4 MTB

MT BULLER, VIC

Info: bike.mtbuller.com.au/epic.php When to go: October-May

For any keen mountain bikers, the first-ever IMBA (International Mountain Bicycling Association) accredited Epic Trail in the southern hemisphere – Mt Buller's 40km Australian Alpine Epic Trail – is at the top of their bucket list. This trail (rated intermediate/advanced) will take around five to eight hours to complete.

The total climb is 1245m but that grunt-work is rewarded with 2187m of sweet descent, down through some amazing high country terrain. Towering gum trees, huge ferns, plenty of berms and a singletrack section following the Delatite River are highlights.

Make sure you slow down and check out how much work went into building this trail. The team at World Trails, led by Glen Jacobs, has done a sterling job of creating the new sections of this trail, and linking these with parts of already established trails.

And best of all, during this one day, you get to experience parts of some of Buller's other famous trails, such as Stonefly, Woolly Butt and Gang Gangs, that have been incorporated into the Epic. One day riding Buller is awesome; a week is not enough!

PADDLING KANGAROO VALLEY, NSW

Info: www.kangaroovalleystourist.asn.au

When to go: All year

5 The perfect canoe trip for the whole family, this paddle down the Shoalhaven River begins in the hamlet of Kangaroo Valley. Your put-in is just below the historic Hampden Bridge (Australia's oldest suspension bridge) and then it is just a matter of how fast or slow you wish to float 5km downriver to the riverside Bendeela campground.

Along the way you will get the chance to look for a range of wildlife, including rock wallabies, kingfishers, water dragons and even platypus if you're lucky (this author was fortunate enough to spot two platypuses here). The trip is suited to beginner paddlers and children



(make sure everyone in the canoe is wearing a PFD) with mostly flat water only interrupted by six sets of very small rapids (ruffles is probably a better description), which add just enough excitement without causing difficulty.

For those visiting for the day, the best bet is to hire a canoe from one of the local operators – they will organise all your essential gear and also pick you up from Bendeela campground in the afternoon. All you have to do is enjoy the river and relax with a nice post-paddle lunch at Bendeela. The trip is brilliant – and with the area's mild climate, can be undertaken any time of year.

20th Anniversary
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Hiking

MT WELLINGTON, TAS

Info: www.discovertasmania.com.au

When to go: All year

6

A very short drive from Hobart (around 20 minutes) and you're in a wild landscape that feels like it should be a million miles from civilisation. The large Wellington Park covers 18,000ha and there are a number of walks including the jaunt up the Pinnacle Track (which then becomes the Zig Zag Track further up the mountain) to the 1271m summit of Mt Wellington itself. This track starts at Fern Tree track-head, just off Huon Road, and is steep and slightly challenging in parts but can be knocked off in around two to three hours at a reasonable pace.

Mt Wellington is such a fantastic day-adventure destination because it has so many tracks that can be easily linked up for a long day in the wilds. And that's exactly what we'd recommend; instead of returning all the way along the Pinnacle Track, we'd opt to return from the summit along this track initially, before turning left onto the Organ Pipes Track to check out this amazing natural rock formation comprised of impressive dolerite columns. After this, you can double back onto the Pinnacle Track for the trek back down to your start point – or you could follow Sawmill Track (off Organ Pipes Track) and check out Sphinx Rock, before joining Lenah Valley Track and then jumping back onto the last section of Pinnacle Track. One day isn't really enough, but it will give you a good taste of what this awesome reserve with its 500 native plant species and healthy native fauna population has to offer visitors.



CAMPING

WANGI FALLS, LITCHFIELD NP, NT

Info: www.parksandwildlife.nt.gov.au

When to go: April-November

7

With easy access (around two hours west of Darwin), a beautiful waterfall and awesome swimming, walking and wildlife spotting, the Wangi Falls campground in pretty Litchfield National Park is a brilliant option for an overnighter.

The campground is open the whole year and offers Litchfield NP's only caravan campsites (non-powered), along with camper-trailer and tent sites. It is close to some of Litchfield's most popular attractions, such as Buley Rockhole, Cascades, Florence Falls and Blyth Homestead. Wangi Falls campground also has a few of its own short adventures, such as the 1.6km-return walk (steep in sections but well graded) through lush forest to the lookout at the top of the falls. This walk starts at the awesome Wangi Plunge Pool, so it is worth doing the walk first, then coming back down to the waterhole for a cool swim – and perhaps an even cooler beer with a picnic lunch. Other short walks nearby include the two-hour sojourn along Walker Creek, north of Wangi Falls, and the walk around The Lost City (reached via a 4WD track), which is a series of tower-like rock formations that make a great adventure for those young explorers in your family.

For a brief taste of the Top End, it's hard to beat 24 hours based at this magical campground in what would have to be one of Australia's most picturesque national parks.



Hiking

ORMISTON POUND WALK, NT

Info: www.nt.gov.au/parks

When to go: May-September

8

One of the AG Outdoor team's favourite day walks, the Ormiston Pound Walk is a microcosm of its nearby big brother, the Larapinta Trail. Ormiston Pound is 135km west of Alice Springs, in the West MacDonnell Ranges.

This day walk has everything, from shaded gorges with red rock cliffs looming on either side, to the incredible pound itself, with its lunar-esque landscape. There's also rocky sections that house a surprising amount of native fauna, and some fantastic high viewpoints.

We'd recommend walking this loop in an anti-clockwise direction, starting at the carpark area. That way, the loop will build up to the awesome finish of walking (or wading/swimming) through Ormiston Gorge itself.

The land is the big attraction; as you make your way around the circuit you move through different geological zones (limestone, quartzite, granite) and the resultant vegetation (or lack of) is unique to each section. The views at the high ridge just before you drop into the pound give you some sense of scale to the area, and entering Ormiston Gorge itself – after the flat walk across the pound floor – is like entering another world. Here, ghost gums cling precariously to the red cliff walls, the waterholes are like mirrors and, if you're lucky, you may even spot a dingo or wallaby drinking from these. If it is warm enough, you can go for a dip in the deep waterhole back near the start of the walk. If you've only got one day to experience the Red Centre on foot, this is the place to do it.



9 MTB

DERBY, TAS

Info: www.ridebluederby.com.au **When to go:** All year

It's one of the outdoor tourism world's great resurrection stories: take one near-forgotten Tassie mining town, add a network of MTB trails dubbed Blue Derby and built by Aussie trail-building legends Glen Jacobs and World Trail, and suddenly you are the centre of the MTB world's attention. Yep, it's that easy, helped of course by the fact the town is right behind the development. Oh, and the fact the trails wind through pristine wilderness; you wouldn't even know there had been any mining in this area, the vegetation has grown back so fully.

At the moment, the Blue Derby network comprises 21km but there are plans in place to build another 40-odd kays of trail, including a full one-day adventure that will take riders from Blue Tier back to Derby. For us, that expansion cannot come quickly enough, but in the meantime, there's

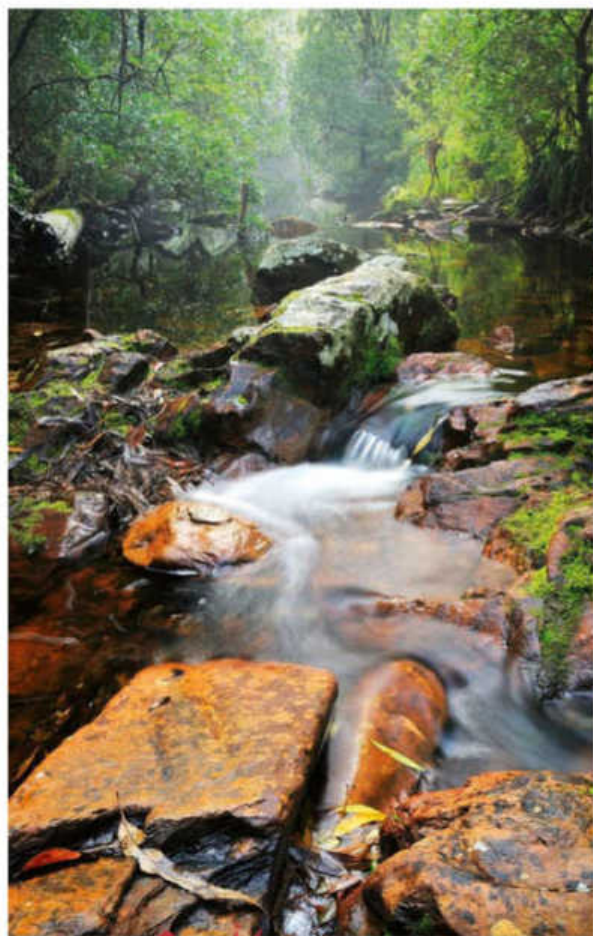
easily a day's worth of riding here, interspersed with a fantastic pub lunch and dinner (and yep, a cold Tassie ale), as the trailhead is a miniscule 200m from town.

Does it get any better? Well, the trails themselves up the ante; the bermed sweet-flowing trails signal the handiwork of World Trail, and the team has done a brilliant job working around the natural and manmade (mining relics) obstacles, so all you have to do is rail them, as fast or as slow as you like. Easier trail sections are close to town, making for a nice short adventure for beginners/young'uns, and as you work your way further up the trails, you will tackle more challenging terrain.

Just one of the many exciting Tassie MTB trail networks, Blue Derby could also be incorporated into a week-long MTB road trip to the Apple Isle.

20th Anniversary

Outdoor 20 Days of adventure



PADDLING NYMBOIDA RIVER, NSW

Info: www.nymboidacanoecentre.com

When to go: November-May

11

This natural-flow river in northern NSW offers a day's adventure for all paddling disciplines and skill levels. The perfect one-day whitewater adventure is a guided rafting expedition on the river. It may be only 9km in length, but over the course of this day's rafting you will confront 25 Grade III-IV rapids, have the opportunity to dive off the rocks into deeper sections and get to see some of the north coast hinterland's unspoiled wilderness.

For flatwater paddlers (canoeists and kayakers), the best option is to base yourself at Nymboida River campground, in Nymboida National Park, and explore the river from over the course of a day. Or you can head to the excellent Nymboida Canoe Centre and join one of its Australian Canoeing-accredited canoe/kayak courses and brush up on your skills under the expert tutelage of the instructors there. The centre also offers guided tours and canoe/kayak hire as well as accommodation (campsites and basic cabins) and this is a brilliant way to spend a few days with the family learning how to paddle in the Nymboida's calmer sections of water. It also offers fantastic wildlife spotting, so look out for water dragons, turtles and the ever-reclusive platypus.



HIKING LAMINGTON NATIONAL PARK, QLD

Info: www.npsr.qld.gov.au/parks/lamington

When to go: All year, but drier months May-October is ideal

12

Lamington National Park in Queensland's south-east is a rainforest oasis not far from the glitzy hubbub of the Gold Coast. In just a two-hour drive from Brisbane you can be immersed in one of the state's most significant parks, which forms part of the World Heritage-listed Gondwana Rainforest area. More than 150km of walking tracks take you through lush rainforests and myriad (more than 500) waterfalls and up to the plateaus that are the northern remnants of an ancient volcano, of which Mt Warning was the plug.

At just over 20,000ha, the park has a big choice of day walks, from both the Binna Burra and the Green Mountain (O'Reilly's) sections. The 12km Daves Creek Circuit will give you a good taste of what the park has to offer. From the Binna Burra campground, the relatively flat track takes you down into the Kur-raragin Valley and passes through a variety of vegetation, from subtropical to warm temperate and wet sclerophyll forest, as well as cliff-top views looking out to the Numinbah Valley.

Look out for lyrebirds, lizards, pythons, antechinus and the famous blue crayfish. Be prepared for the odd leech in wet conditions.

At the end of the walk, reward yourself and grab some grub at the Lamington Tea House. – Carolyn Barry

CAMPING CAPE CONRAN COASTAL PARK, VIC

Info: www.conran.net.au and parkweb.vic.gov.au/explore/parks/cape-conran-coastal-park

When to go: All year

10

Parks Victoria offers campers at the beautiful Cape Conran a unique way of spending a night (or two). Cape Conran is one of the Parks Victoria campgrounds that feature the awesome Wilderness Retreat accommodation option. This comprises a low environmental-impact safari cabin (with lockable front door) that includes a queen size bed, trundle single bed (both with all bed linen supplied), futon (that also converts to another bed), small fridge, tables and chairs, an outside deck, and a shared kitchen (for Wilderness Retreat guests only). The WR shared kitchen includes cutlery, utensils, crockery, a gas cooktop, full-size fridge, hot/cold water, microwave oven and a toaster. There are also WR-only toilets and showers. Ummm, yeah, this truly is the world of glamping.

Luxuries aside, the retreats also offer plenty of wildlife spotting opportunities; keep a look out for bandicoots, potoroos, birdlife and much more. The walking track network at Cape Conran is extensive, and there are plenty of opportunities to explore either on foot (Pearl Point Walk is a great option), or you can jump in your vehicle and tackle a self-drive adventure, checking out the beautiful waterways and indigenous cultural sites. Not a bad way to spend 24 hours.



PADDLING KATHERINE RIVER, NT

Info: www.nt.gov.au/parks

When to go: June-September

13

A truly unique full-day experience, canoeing the first three gorges (of a total of nine) of beautiful Katherine Gorge, inside Nitmuluk National Park, will be a life-memory. This paddle trip (around 7km) has many highlights, including the obvious one of escaping the tourist boats and crowds (especially if you make it to the third gorge). The wildlife will amaze you; turtles, water monitors and freshwater crocs can all be seen here. The paddling itself is not too strenuous – it will be the portages between gorges that take the most effort – and if you do get too hot, tired or otherwise, you can simply pull in at one of the many sandy beaches along the gorge(s) and take a dip in the refreshing water.

The recommended day limit is a paddle to the third gorge and then return, and we'd second that. Doing this means you're not rushing to get as far up the gorge network as you can during the one day, plus it also gives you time to explore the many side trips: the Jawoyn rock art site at the end of the first gorge; the short walk up to Butterfly Gorge and the Hanging gardens (a cluster of rainforest plants fed via the escarpment run-off) of gorge two; and another swimming hole at Lily Ponds, near the turn-around point at the eastern end of the third gorge.

20th Anniversary Outdoor 20 Days of adventure



MTB TATHRA, NSW

Info: www.sapphirecoast.com.au

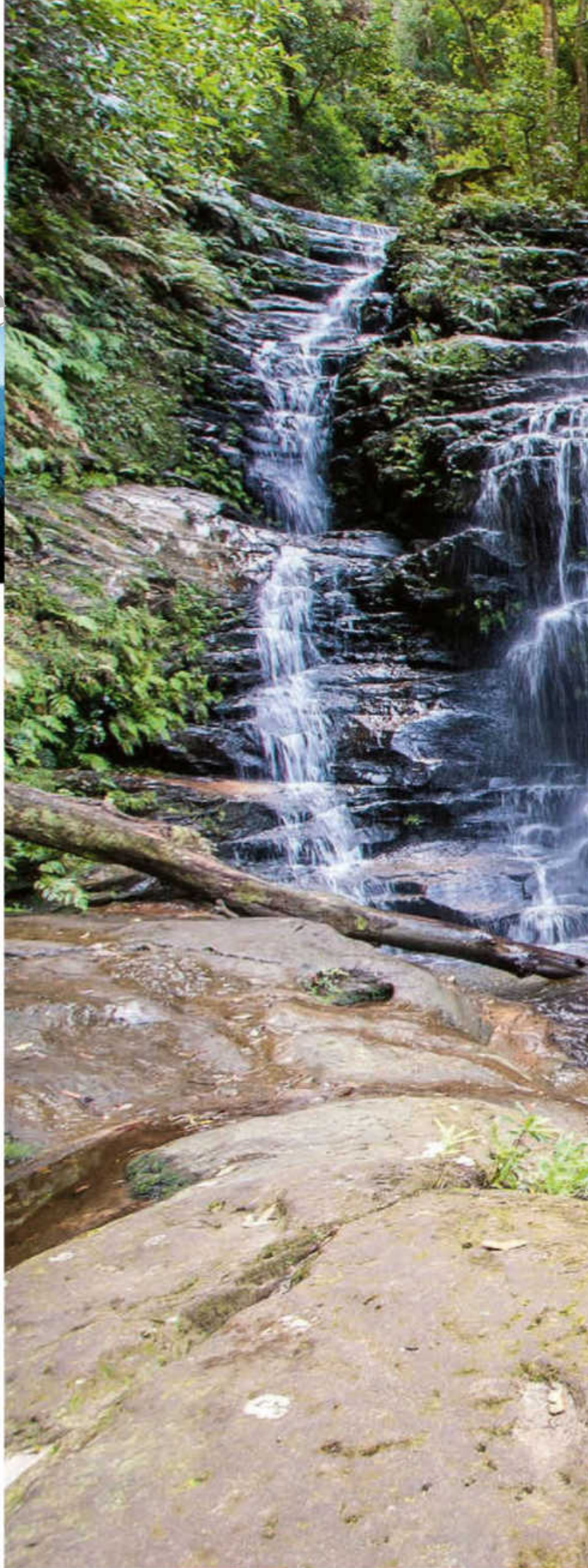
When to go: All year

14

It's our ultimate day: an early start riding some of the country's most lauded trails in the morning, followed by an awesome mid-morning breakfast, then a quick surf at the beach, followed by more riding of said trails that afternoon and evening. Yes, it is possible – you just have to head to the Sapphire Coast town of Tathra to make this dreamlike scenario a reality.

This small coastal town has garnered a huge reputation as the location of an awesome, easily accessed trail network: the trails are a five-minute ride from Tathra beach itself. The Bundabung trail network is the result of hard work from the MTB community in conjunction with the Bega Aboriginal Land Council.

For a day's ride, the first thing you need to do is go and say g'day to the team at Tathra Beach & Bike, where you can grab a free trail network map and then ride a further 800m down the road to the trailhead. The trail network caters for all abilities, with beginner Green, intermediate Blue and expert Black rated trails all marked both on the map and on the trail signage. A great loop, with a mix of grades over its 32km, takes in three climbs and three descents. The climbs are Evil Tom, Nelba's Rise and Kingy's, and the descents are Bridges (*AG Outdoor's* favourite; a Black rated trail), Anchors Away and Nizentite. Combine it in one session or take our suggestion from above and split it over the whole day. There are few better ways to spend a day enjoying the outdoors.



15

Hiking

BLUE MOUNTAINS, NSW

Info: www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au When to go: All year

Take a two-hour drive west of Sydney and you're immersed in a day-hiking wonderland. The World Heritage-listed Blue Mountains National Park is an all-year playground, with loads of one-day foot-borne options. How about combining two walks in the one day? Kick off with the 5.4km (around 2-3 hours) National Pass, at Wentworth Falls, then venture west to Blackheath and finish off with the Grand Canyon Track, a 6km journey through sandstone cliff walls and past waterfalls.

The National Pass track, starting from Conservation Hut, is cut out of the side of cliffs and provides gob-smacking views across the park's eastern and southern sections. Highlights include the Valley of the Waters which, as the name suggests, contains numerous waterfalls (Empress Falls is a fave), and the historic Grand Stairway (built by hand more than 100 years ago) that takes you up to viewpoints overlooking Wentworth Falls.

Grab a quick lunch then drive to Blackheath, and on to Evans Lookout Road where the Grand Canyon Track carpark is (signposted). You'll soon be away from the sun, dropping down into the shady canyon, and walking through some lush vegetation as you reach the canyon floor and follow pretty Greaves Creek up to Evans Lookout itself. From here, you can follow the road back to your car.



20th Anniversary

Outdoor 20 Days of adventure



MTB ALICE SPRINGS, NT

Info: www.parksandwildlife.nt.gov.au/parks/walks/bike-trails

When to go: April-October

17

The Red Centre capital is fast becoming a byword for awesome mountain biking, with a huge (and fast expanding) network of trails that cater for all riding abilities. For families looking for a sedate cruise that takes in some of the unique outback terrain the Alice Springs area has to offer, the Ilentye Trail (a 4.9km loop) is well worth a day out as it winds out from town to the historic Telegraph Station. Pack a picnic lunch and take a break on the banks of the (usually) dry Todd River, and then ride back into town.

For those after a challenging full day, you can tackle the Arrwe Trail from the Telegraph Station, and then join on to the Apwelantye Trail, which will take you right out to picturesque Wigleys Gorge before turning back to the Telegraph Station and returning via the Apwelantye before rejoining the Arrwe. The Arrwe and Apwelantye are both graded intermediate and offer some awesome singletrack, some cool switchbacks, plenty of gorgeous views and a few steep slopes along the way.

These trails starting from the Telegraph Station are just a small part of the larger trail network here. For a smooth-riding road/hybrid journey, you can also tackle the 17km sealed Simpsons Gap Cycle Path, which links this famous West MacDonnells gorge to Flynn's Memorial, on the western edge of town. It's another great ride for the whole cycling family, with picnic tables and scenic lookouts along its path.

CAMPING WILPENA POUND, SA

Info: www.wilpenapound.com.au/campground

When to go: All year

18

Located inside the awesome Flinders Ranges National Park, the campground at Wilpena Pound Resort (just outside the entrance to the Pound itself) is the perfect base camp from which to plan day walks and wildlife spotting over the course of the day. There are loads of powered sites (44, in fact), plenty of space for bush camping (the campground covers 50ha), fire pits and barbecues, great amenities (three toilet/shower blocks and a couple of laundries), a well-stocked store and, if you're feeling like a bit of indulgence, you're not far from the Wilpena Pound Resort and its bar and restaurant.

For those after a little more in the way of luxury, the campground has a number of permanent tents onsite. These safari-style tents can house up to five people and are located near the Resort's restaurant and bar (and pool), plus they include a fridge, water and power.

Of course, culinary and accommodation delights aside, it is the wilderness that brings campers here and there are no shortage of examples of what makes this region so popular: it is nearly too easy spotting some of the prolific wildlife, such as emus, kangaroos and wedge-tailed eagles while walking around the campground. Add in the number of day walks – including the awesome one-day return hike up the Flinders' high-point of St Mary Peak – mountain biking trails and 4WD tours and your 24 hours here will just seem like a tease.



CAMPING ELLERY CREEK BIG HOLE, NT

Info: www.parksandwildlife.nt.gov.au

When to go: All year

16

Drive 80km west of Alice Springs, through the spectacular West MacDonnell Ranges, and you come to one of the Northern Territory's best campgrounds. Ellery Creek Big Hole has picturesque sites for tents, camper-trailers, vehicles and caravans, with the rugged cliffs and ridges of the West Macs as a background. It is easily accessed by 2WD vehicles, with the only gravel/dirt section the last 2km to the campground. The campground has toilets and gas barbecues (no fresh water) and is based around a "first in, best dressed" scenario when it comes to selecting a site. The campground is popular all-year round but especially in spring and summer. In the winter months of the dry season you shouldn't have too much trouble snaring a site.

As the name suggests, the Big Hole in this instance is a massive waterhole (around 150m from the campground) that is brilliant for swimming and even has its own sandy beach, making it ideal for family groups.

As well as splashing around in the main section of the waterhole, more adventurous swimmers can continue on through the gap in the rocky cliffs at the far end of the waterhole and do some exploring. Just be aware the water can be very cold in some sections.

There are also short walks nearby and the famous Larapinta Trail passes by here as well. For that star-filled outback night, this campsite is hard to beat.



19 CAMPING

TOM GROGGIN, KOSCIUSZKO NP, NSW

Info: www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au When to go: October-April

This campground, in Kosciuszko NP's southern section, offers the full High Country experience. There's tons of space for cars, tents and camper-trailers, plus easy access for 2WD vehicles (via Kosciuszko Road, then on to Alpine Way) driving south from the NSW ski town of Jindabyne. The 58km drive means you can start early, set up camp and take advantage of the location, on the banks of the upper Murray River.

Yep, that means plenty of riverside exploring for the little'uns, plus the chance to throw in a line and test your fly-fishing skills on the river's trout. You can opt for a car tour of the surrounding region and, if you have a 4WD you can tackle more serious challenges and explore nearby Snowy River NP's (just across the border in Victoria) many tracks and viewpoints.

Then you can finish a great day with a camp oven-cooked meal over one of the campground's fire rings. If you're lucky, it will include freshly caught trout.

PADDLING

TWOFOLD BAY, NSW

Info: www.visiteden.com.au

When to go: September-May

20

The third-deepest natural harbour in the southern hemisphere is a playground for migrating whales and a brilliant paddling destination. The bay offers plenty of beaches to put in from, plus numerous coves to explore via sea kayak. If you put in at the sheltered Cocora Beach, just at the southern end of Eden (accessed via the Princes Highway that runs through the town), you can paddle around some pretty little sheltered coves, and cross the Nullica River mouth on your way to historical Seahorse Inn at Boydtown, which offers great lunches and coffees. From here, it's a paddle past Kiah Inlet to Edrom Lodge and another stop, this time to explore historic Davidson Whaling Station. This station and its whalers are famous for being a part of an amazing point in history when the whalers worked in tandem



with a pod of killer whales to harvest migrating whales (be sure to check out the Eden Killer Whale Museum in town to learn more about this amazing occurrence).

After a wander around the whaling station, jump back in your kayak and follow the coastline further south to a few small beaches – any one of which make for a great lunch or afternoon tea spot. Then, it's not much more than an hour or so of paddling across the bay (keep an eye out for seals, penguins and whales) to return to your start point of Cocora Beach. There are worse ways to spend a day.

A full-page background image showing two hikers in bright green and blue gear walking away on a dirt trail that winds across a grassy, rocky mountain ridge. In the distance, there are more mountain peaks under a cloudy sky. The title text is overlaid on the top half of the image.

GOING THE WHOLE NINE YARDS

Three adventure runners tackle New Zealand's nine Great Walks in as many days... and live to regret their decision to rush through paradise

WORDS AND PHOTOS **PATRICK KINSELLA**



Mark Twain famously proclaimed that a round of golf was a good walk ruined, but I've discovered something that totally trounces the well-travelled trumper's oft-quoted gripe. Any idiot with a set of clubs can spoil a good walk, but it takes real commitment to ruin a genuinely great one. After some serious planning and training, I've come up with a magic formula for doing just that: You run it, against the ticking clock.

I know this because — with two like-minded fleet-footed fools, Ben Southall and Luke Edwards — I've just emerged from an attempt to complete New Zealand's nine official Great Walks in nine days. Success would see us running into the record books, and it all seemed like such an excellent idea when we dreamt it up.

And much of the escapade was fantastic, of course. We experienced so much of NZ's diverse landscape in such a concentrated period of time that it blew my tiny little mind — but running over 400km in nine days inevitably produces the occasional flicker of self-doubt about the wisdom of one's behaviour. Especially when you're hurrying through Eden.

MISSION IMPROBABLE

As anyone with so much as a passing interest in outdoor pursuits knows, New Zealand has an absolute embarrassment of riches when it comes to tramping trails. The place is dissected by thousands of them, but nine extra special tracks — a veritable premier league of paths — have been officially declared the country's 'Great Walks', either because they showcase a particular facet of New Zealand's incredibly eclectic terrain, or because they're simply, undeniably, incontrovertibly great walks. (Although, technically, one of them — the Whanganui River Journey — isn't a walk at all, it's a paddling adventure.)

All nine Great Walks are intended as multiday adventures. The Whanganui River Journey is 145km long, and the eight walking tracks range from 32km to 78.4km. If someone set out to do them all, back-to-back, the Department of Conservation (DoC) would normally advise them to allow at least 28 days, not factoring in travel time between trailheads or potential disruption from NZ's notoriously exciting weather. We tried squeezing the whole lot into a week and a half.

It was halfway around the Abel Tasman Track that the true stupidity of our endeavour slapped me full in the face. All day I'd been running (hobbling, panting, wheezing, gasping) past happy hikers, contentedly chatting as they meandered to their next hut or wandered down to one of the coves that punctuate this coastal path for a swim.

And that is exactly the right way to do the Abel Tasman Track. The trail is stunning, climbing through rata trees and dropping onto one ludicrously idyllic beach after another, most accessible only by foot (or kayak). On one golden arc, the only living presence we shared the sand with was a grumpy lump of a fur seal.

Magical. But could we stop and enjoy it? No — because we were hooning around the trail, terrified of missing the interisland ferry and scuttling the whole expedition. Such was our rush that we might have missed the sleeping seal — or even run right into her — if she hadn't awoken with an indignant belch.

SOUTH ISLAND

We started the expedition gently, with the 32km Rakiura Track on Stewart Island in the country's über remote far south — the sort of eccentric place where a sea lion once wobbled up to the bar in the local pub in the main town of Oban.

Everything about this little-visited and fantastically idiosyncratic isle is tropical — except, strangely, the weather — but we were lucky to get near-perfect conditions for our maiden run. The terrain proved forgiving too, with minimal elevation, a sandy track and even a brief encounter with a wild kiwi bird, a rare privilege indeed.

Infamously feisty Fiordland was always going to present us with much sterner obstacles to overcome. The track profiles really begin to bare their teeth here, where terrific peaks tower over mighty sounds, and all three Great Walk tracks that tiptoe through this wet wilderness are just as notorious for their challenging conditions as they are famed for their heart-stealing beauty.

...New Zealand has an absolute embarrassment of riches when it comes to tramping trails.

Greatness doesn't like to be rushed, and all the time we were planning the expedition, we knew that avalanches, flooding, blizzards, people-flattening winds and various other acts of wild violence could easily derail our mission here.

Fortunately, though, Mother Nature was in pretty benign humour during our visit.

A boisterous wind did chase us along the knifelike ridges of the 60km Kepler Track, but I only got blown over once (and that might have been down to my own clumsiness). Bouncing back up, I rejoined the boys to scale the peaks and enter the embrace of the valley with childlike ➤

glee. Our first ultra-distance run was in the bag.

The guy driving us in a water taxi to the next trailhead, at the top of Te Anau lake, let it slip that he'd just been evacuating hunters from the area because of a worsening weather forecast, so we knew we'd have the elements on our heels for the upcoming 54km.

Sure enough, the Milford Track regaled us with rainfall for most of the day, but this is exactly what the original (and many say best) Great Walk is famous for, and the heavenly hydraulics are the force behind the waterfalls that cascade on all sides of this incredible path. Fortunately, Rosco, who runs a kayaking business in one of the wettest places on the planet, was waiting to pick us up at the other end, Sandfly Point, so at least there was no waiting around, getting cold and being eaten alive by the area's famous residents.

Rain turned to snow on the rugged Routeburn Track, transforming a 32km 'short' day into an 8-hour wintery epic, through a frosty landscape devoid of human life. On days like this, sensible hikers huddle around pot-belly stoves in snug huts. But we had warm gear, and the clock was tick-tocking, so on we ran.

A 17-hour drive from the bottom of the South Island to the start of the Heaphy at the island's northwest extremity meant we began our biggest challenge — a frankly frightening 78.4km run — well behind schedule. Originally we'd planned to mountain bike this track, which traverses Kahurangi NP and is dual access for half the year, but our timing was wrong. Shame. The switch-backs and flowing trail would be brilliant on a bike, and even with the daily adrenaline overdose, my body was getting tired of running — particularly my right knee, which began to mutter mutinously.

The first 20km from Kohaihai was relatively flat, as the track traces the wild west coast, threading in and out of ancient rainforests and skirting deserted beaches constantly combed by the crashing surf of the Tasman Sea. But then the climbing begins. It's actually quite gentle, compared to some of the ascents we'd faced in Fiordland, but by nightfall my knee was swollen like an alarmed pufferfish. Every step was agony, but the only option was to continue. Our support drivers were waiting at the far trailhead, 463km by road from where they'd dropped us off.

After our late start, darkness had been on our heels from the outset, and with me dragging my right leg like a wounded animal, the night caught us up well before the halfway point. The kindness of complete strangers in the huts buoyed our

...but running over 400km in nine days inevitably produces the occasional flicker of self-doubt about the wisdom of one's behaviour. Especially when you're hurrying through Eden.

spirits at low points such as this. After hearing about our mission, many trampers insisted on making us mugs of soup and coffee, and their enthusiasm for the escapade kept us smiling through the pain.

It was becoming more than a physical challenge by this point too. While I was suffering with my knee, Luke was struggling with an altogether different issue. As the day died and darkness surrounded us, he became convinced he could see a madman with an axe chasing us through the shadowy realm beyond the reach of our headtorches. He was, of course, being haunted by a sleepmonster — a species of spectre that often visits adventure racers, endurance athletes and military personnel when their brains become as tired as their bodies during long-distance, multiday missions.

By this stage, thanks to my knackered knee, I was trailing the other two by some distance,



Above: Crossing the final bridge at the end of the Waikaremoana Track to complete the challenge.

Right: Racing sunset across the top of Panekire Bluff on the Waikaremoana Track.



Left Snow transforms the Routeburn Track into a white wilderness.
Above: Battling the sand along the beaches of the Abel Tasman Coastal Walk.



and while Luke sweated at the thought of the axe-wielding maniac on his tail, I was visited by a much friendlier presence, one that was made of actual flesh and feathers. As I limped on, several kiwi birds emerged from the scrub and began running alongside me. It was a surreal and wonderful moment, one that never would have happened if I'd been running the track at a more sociable hour, and it got me through to the end of the trail. There I fell into a dark coma, interrupted by nightmares that my throbbing knee would force me to abandon the expedition.

In the end though, it wasn't my grumbling body so much as my indignant brain that made the Abel Tasman so tough. Dawn presented a glorious sunrise, and all day the sparkling sea lapped teasingly at our feet as we crossed one beautiful bay after another. But we had a ferry to catch, so had to be content with wading through the occasional tidal crossing for relief. We made the ferry to the North Island, and that's where the real trouble began.

NORTH ISLAND

Our sixth track — the Whanganui River Journey — demanded that we swap trail-running shoes for kayaks. This waterway is usually gentle enough for families to float down it in canoes, but the flow was fast and high after a three-day deluge. Commercial operators had stopped running trips until it settled, but we didn't have that time luxury. We'd also traded stability for speed in our choice of boat, and that would bite us.

Luke looked nervous as we approached the first rapid, and his narrow surfski soon proved too twitchy. After his 10th involuntary dunking, he was seriously cold and we had to get him off ➤



Running into a mighty wind on the Kepler Track.

the river. Ben and I concurred — with the time lost, and a man down, there was no real choice but to park the paddle and prepare for the final two tracks. Our record, if it was destined to be a record, would be for a trail-running expedition — we'd have to come back another time.

After the colour explosion of the South Island tracks, the volcanic landscape on the 43km Tongariro Northern Circuit had a touch of the apocalypse about it. Feeling as though we were running on the dark side of the moon, we battled icy 80km/h winds on the saddle, before skirting the luminous Emerald Lake and turning for home.

There was no rest stop this time, though. To finish the mission on the ninth day, we had to leave immediately and run the 43km Lake Waikaremoana Track overnight. Our crew had a helicopter waiting.

Lake Waikaremoana and the escarpment that traces its southern shore looked stunning from the air. We glimpsed the sun setting on its rippling waters while climbing Panekire to a dramatically positioned hut, where two happy trampers made us tea and described the track that we were about to run, but the rest of that route we saw mostly by torchlight.

END OF THE TRAIL

At 07:50 the following morning we emerged at the final trailhead, with 40 minutes to spare before the expedition clicked into its 10th day. We'd set a new record for the fastest completion of New Zealand's eight great walking trails, but the full length of the Whanganui had eluded us.

That's one reason to come back. The other is to explore these nine Great Walks as they're supposed to be experienced — at walking pace. It turns out there's a clue in the name.

Yet, even if this really was the silliest way to see the best of New Zealand, it was a wild ride and I'm proud of the achievement. I just shudder to think what Mr Twain would have said.

**A documentary on the NZ9 expedition will be broadcast on Australian TV later in the year.*

THE GREAT WALKS

Rakiura Track

Length: 32km

Recommended time: 3 days

Access point: Oban

Stay: Rakiura Retreat, 156 Horseshoe Bay Road, Stewart Island; (03) 315 6589, www.rakiuraretreat.co.nz

Kepler Track

Length: 60km

Recommended time: 3–4 days

Access point: Te Anau

Stay: Te Anau YHA Hostel, 29 Mokonui St, Te Anau, (03) 249 7847, www.yha.co.nz

Milford Track

Length: 53.3km

Recommended time: 4 days

Access point: Te Anau (then boat to Glade Wharf)

Stay: Te Anau YHA Hostel, 29 Mokonui St, Te Anau, (03) 249 7847, www.yha.co.nz

Routeburn Track

Length: 32km

Recommended time: 2–4 days

Access point: Glenorchy or Te Anau

Stay: Te Anau YHA Hostel, 29 Mokonui St, Te Anau, (03) 249 7847, www.yha.co.nz

Heaphy Track

Length: 78.4km

Recommended time: 4–6 days

Access point: Brown Hut, Golden Bay or Kohaihai

Stay: Kohaihai River campsite, (03) 546 9339, www.doc.govt.nz

Abel Tasman Coast Track

Length: 54.4km

Recommended time: 3–5 days

Access point: Marahau (via Nelson) or Wainui (via Takaka)

Stay: Golden Bay Hideaway, 220 McShane Rd, Wainui Bay, (03) 525 7184, www.goldenbayhideaway.co.nz

Whanganui Journey

Length: 145km

Recommended time: 5 days

Access point: Taumarunui

Stay: Taumarunui Holiday Park, 487 Totara St, Manunui, Taumarunui (07) 895 9345, www.taumarunuiholidaypark.co.nz

Tongariro Northern Circuit

Length: 43.1km

Recommended time: 3–4 days

Access point: Whakapapa Village

Stay: Whakapapa Holiday Village (next to the Tongariro National Park Visitor Centre, (07) 892 3897, www.whakapapa.net.nz)

Waikaremoana Track

Length: 46km

Recommended time: 3–4 days

Access point: Onepoto or Hopuruahine Landing (both via the scenic Te Urewera Rainforest Route, SH38)

Stay: Lake Waikaremoana Holiday Park, 6249 Lake Road, Te Urewera National Park, (06) 837 3826, www.waikaremoana.info

THE NEW ZEALAND 9 EXPEDITION SPONSORS

100% New Zealand (www.newzealand.com)
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(www.doc.govt.nz)

YHA New Zealand (www.yha.co.nz)

Britz Campervans (www.britz.co.nz)

Mountain Designs

(www.mountaindesigns.com)

etixx sports nutrition (www.etixxsports.com)

Ay-Up Lights (www.ayup-lights.com)

Hoka One One (www.hokaoneone.eu)

Flow Kayaks (www.flowkayaks.com)

Carboglass (www.carboglass.co.nz)

YB Tracking (www.ybtracking.com)

Interislander Ferries (www.interislander.co.nz)

Real Journeys (www.realjourneys.co.nz)

THE ESSENTIALS

Walk this way: The Department of Conservation (www.doc.govt.nz) is the best source of information about everything relating to New Zealand's Great Walks.

Transport: To take on all or several of the Great Walks in one visit, you will need to have your own vehicle. Hiring a campervan is an excellent answer to both your transportation and accommodation requirements. For more information visit www.britz.co.nz or call 1300 738 087 (within Australia) or 0800 081 032 (within New Zealand).

NZ9 info: For more on the expedition, including route maps and run times, see www.theglobaladventurers.com



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Guide Craig Tweedy gets set up for lunch at a secluded bay on the last day's paddle.



TRIPLE TREAT

There are many ways to enjoy New Zealand's spectacular Queen Charlotte Track, so why not try a few of them? This three-day adventure includes walking, biking and paddling... as well as some seriously comfortable accommodation.

WORDS AND PHOTOS JUSTIN WALKER

It's a cliché, but when it comes to experiencing New Zealand's fabulous Queen Charlotte Track, in the Marlborough Sounds region of the South Island, there really is more than one way to skin this cat (apologies in advance to feline appreciators).

This 70km-long track follows a winding, undulating route between historic Ship Cove at the northern point (Captain Cook dropped his anchor here five separate times during his explorations – at one point building a semi-permanent camp, complete with vegetable garden and pig pens, while his ship was

repaired) and pretty Anakiwa at the southern end. This route takes you through forest and up, down and along high ridgelines that offer brilliant views over Queen Charlotte and Kenepuru sounds. For most, north to south is the preferred direction, with a ferry from the beautiful port town of Picton taking you to the Ship Cove start point.

So what exactly are the different ways you can skin this track? Well, you can walk the entire way, mountain bike it (access limitations apply in peak summer season) or, if you're like me and keen to try something a bit different, you can shoehorn three outdoor activities into

the one track: walk the first part, pedal the middle section, then finish off with a glorious sea kayak journey to track's end, all while staying at some perfectly positioned lodges along the way. Yes, it does sound perfect – and I didn't even have to plan a thing; renowned Picton-based outfitters, Marlborough Sounds Adventure Company, offer this exact three-day, multi-activity trip. All I had to do was put my hand up and say, "Yes, please!"

A UNIQUE JOURNEY

Setting foot on the QCT entails a slightly different preparation to most of NZ's tracks. ➤



This exposed section of track section makes for exciting riding and brilliant views.



The QCT also has DOC campsites and they also offer great vistas.



The flowing track into Lochmara Lodge is a fantastic way to finish a day's riding.



Unlike most multiday adventures of any discipline, tackling this one offers probably the only thing that most heavy-pack-laden walkers/hikers/paddlers have universally wished for at some point: you can arrange for your luggage to be transferred between each leg of the track. Yep, there's no worrying about how many pairs of shorts/shirts/socks you need to pack — just throw it all in a suitcase and it will be transferred to your next night's lodge accommodation at the beginning of each day's leg. I am all for roughing it, but I am always a sucker for something that combines outdoor adventure with bloody good food and a nice bed for the night...

THOSE FIRST STEPS

There are few better ways to start a three-day adventure than jumping aboard a water taxi

and cruising out through Queen Charlotte Sound to Ship Cove: the sound itself was beautiful, and the Cougar Line boat I was on was accompanied by a pod of dolphins racing the bow waves. I also took the chance to ogle both the beachside lodges dotted along the way, and the privately owned baches (Kiwi-speak for cottages) that nestle in among the lush rainforest that characterises the region. These cute baches really made me wish I was in a better-paid career and could afford to buy one — you know, just for those long weekend escapes out of Sydney. The announcement — around an hour later — that we'd reached Ship Cove jetty was only a slightly rude jolt back to reality. Well, a reality that was fairly dreamlike in its appearance: Ship Cove is nestled at the base of a steep hill that is absolutely smothered in lush, dense, green vegetation. Combine this

with the rich blue of the sound's water and it positively yells "tropical paradise".

After a quick double-check to see that my suitcase was properly marked "Furneaux Lodge", I took a stroll along the jetty and, once at the end, threw on my daypack and took the first steps into the deep, dense rainforest that characterises this track and region. The temperature was about five degrees cooler here; the moist forest air a welcome respite from what had been a cracking hot day. It meant perfect conditions for my hike, which started with a steady climb from the cove.

A MEMORABLE INTRODUCTION

The first few hours on the track were deathly quiet — the only interruption was the occasional chirp of birds and the low whisper of the sea breeze as it flowed through the green-leaf



The QCT is a multi-use track most of the year, allowing cyclists and walkers to share views such as this one of Kenepuru Sound.



Lochmara Lodge runs a very successful wildlife rehabilitation program.



The waters of Queen Charlotte Sound and the Marlborough region are rich in marine life.

The views over Resolution Bay as I made my way down from the top of the initial climb caused me to stop and pause for quite a while to take it all in.

canopy surrounding me. With a long summer day's light ahead of me, I took my time, ambling up the first steep climb at a slow pace and pausing to check out the forest and, when a clearing appeared, I stopped to look out over the sound and further on to glimpses of the North Island across Cook Strait. It really felt like I was the only person left on the planet; the tranquillity was only very slightly shattered when I met some walkers coming up the track from the south. Even then, a brief hello and a knowing smile was all that transpired, as if we

were all reticent to talk too much in case we compromised the serenity.

It is 14km from Ship Cove to Furneaux Lodge, my first overnight stop. The funny thing was, I didn't notice the distance. Whether it was the constant exposure to new and ever-more impressive vistas that kept my mind (and camera) occupied, or it was the enticement of a beautiful chalet at day's end – either way, the 14 kays went by quickly. And I did anything but rush; the views over Resolution Bay as I made my way down from the top of the initial

climb caused me to stop and pause for quite a while to take it all in. And once I got down to the shoreline of Endeavour Inlet, I was positively ambling as I took in the views of the inlet on my left and ogled (okay, lusted after) the cool beaches that were dotted along its shoreline to my right. Furneaux Lodge itself was also no disappointment. The lodge is surrounded by hundreds of hectares of native forest and contains some beautiful accommodation options, such as suites and chalets, as well as a top-notch restaurant that also serves sweet cold Kiwi beer. Looking forward to it much? Yep, I sure was...

Later, sitting at a bench in the lodge's manicured grounds eating dinner, sipping a cold beer and looking out over the inlet's calm waters, I tried to figure out how to describe this first day on the QCT. The best I could ➤

Taking a break on the last leg for a well-earned meal and coffee.





Scouting out our lunch/
coffee stop on the last
day of the QCT.

come up with was that it was the perfect introduction to the track; a brilliant combination of the wild and the civilised. I could definitely get used to it.

THE LONGEST DAY

It was hard to leave my chalet the following morning. However, the promise of another – albeit quick – water taxi ride across to the other side of Endeavour Inlet at Punga Cove, and then a mountain bike ride of around 35km on the track, soon got me moving. My morning departure procedure was identical to the previous day: I wrote my next overnight stop – Lochmara Lodge – on my luggage tags, handed them over to the water taxi crew, then jumped onboard. My bags would be waiting for me at Lochmara – all I had to do was ride 35km of undulating track to catch up with them...

I was being joined on this section of the track (and the kayak leg the following day) by Marlborough Sounds Adventure Company guide Craig Tweedy, a scarily-fit looking Scotsman who spends each southern hemisphere summer working out of Picton. Craig had got the water taxi out from Picton earlier in the morning, bringing our workhorses for the day – a pair of 29er hardtail MTBs – and we would be accompanied by a French couple who were also riding the track today.

Once we'd packed our bike packs with food and water, it was straight into the grinding climb up the track snaking steeply up the first hill out of Punga Cove. It was here that I knew I had made the right choice in splitting my journey along the Queen Charlotte Track across three different activities. The bikes gave us the chance to cover distance more quickly, while

offering the advantage of being able to spend more time at the many lookout points along the way. Bikes also offer a different perspective on the whole QCT experience: buzzing downhill, with the forest whisking by as a deep-green blur was a standout memory of the day.

Not that there was just one. As we moved closer to Lochmara Bay and the lodge of the same name, the views became more and more dramatic. At one point we had both Kenepuru Sound and Queen Charlotte Sound in view at the same time. Then, topping that, we tackled part of the track that hugged a steep cliff, with the rich green waters of Queen Charlotte Sound directly below us, or so it seemed. It was an amazing journey and slightly challenging – mainly due to having to watch where you were going while trying to take in as much of your surrounds as possible, but also due to a ➤



The riding takes a little bit of effort but that is rewarded when you reach the many lookouts.



Spending a day on the water as part of your QCT experience is a must-do.

...buzzing downhill, with the forest whisking by as a deep-green blur was a standout memory of the day.

couple of steep hills that called for a bit of bike-pushing (although not for more than five to 10 minutes). The best, however, was definitely saved for the end of the day; the side track that takes walkers/bikers down to Lochmara Lodge itself is probably one of the most flowing, flat-out-fun trails I have ever ridden, and it offered a fantastic adrenalin-infused finish to the day. Well, besides the already-obligatory waterside beer out the front of the lodge.

Lochmara Lodge is in a sublime location right on the water, and it offers a great wildlife recovery program which has been exceptionally

successful, as proven by the volume of birdsong on the property. There's also a cool art centre on-site and the grounds offer plenty of areas for visitors to escape, with hammocks and benches scattered throughout. If there was ever a place I could spend a week doing very little, this would be it!

FLOATING AWAY

Nothing beats being on the water. For me, it is probably my favourite way to while away a day in the outdoors and it offers one of the strongest reconnections to our natural world. So yeah, I was stoked my last day on this amazing

track was going to actually be, er, off-track. To me, spending at least one day paddling part of the Queen Charlotte Track makes perfect sense. After all, the track is famous for its marine surrounds so why not, literally, jump right into said surrounds for that complete QCT experience.

Craig had caught the last water taxi back to Picton to grab our sea kayaks the previous evening and was back at Lochmara Lodge's own small beach early, packing our gear for the day's paddle. I was down there early, so we took advantage of the calm morning water and headed out once I stowed my daypack in a drybag, and strapped my camera to the top of the kayak. Our path would be a winding one, crossing from one side of the sound to the other, exploring secluded sections of the coastline, checking out the unique coastal rock formation, carved by the sea over millennia, and watching for fish, dolphins and other marine life. We discovered plenty of sea anemones, starfish and other native residents as we made our way slowly toward Anakiwa.

Our early lunch was on our own private beach we'd spotted on the northern side of Grove Arm, and was an experience that soon ranked as my QCT favourite. Sitting on the sand, watching the world pass by as we sipped fresh-brewed coffee and scoffed on salad rolls, it was the physical embodiment of the cliché that life doesn't get any better.

The weird thing was — and it was something I only thought about after we'd landed at Anakiwa at track's end, and were back in our final water taxi barreling back to Picton — we actually paddled a fair distance that day. But, as per the preceding two days on the QCT, with the myriad attractions and relaxing ambience of the track and its surrounds, it was as if time had ceased to matter. And when that happens, you know you've experienced the perfect escape — something the Queen Charlotte Track makes all too easy.

THE ESSENTIALS

Getting there: Air New Zealand flies daily to Wellington from Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. From Wellington, Air New Zealand also offers direct flights to Nelson and Blenheim. See www.airnewzealand.com.

The adventure: Marlborough Sounds Adventure Company offers a wide range of Queen Charlotte Track trips, ranging from independent walking based adventures, through to mountain biking or a three-day multi-activity journey such as the one in this feature story. See www.marlboroughsounds.co.nz.

More information: For all things New Zealand see www.newzealand.com.

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EXPLORE PARADISE

WORDS DEAN MILLER PHOTOS DEAN MILLER AND RON LEIDICH

You might not have heard of Palau but if you're any kind of outdoor enthusiast you should definitely add this tropical paradise to your bucket list.

A full-page photograph showing two people in a red tandem kayak on calm, turquoise water. The person in the front wears a white shirt and a wide-brimmed hat, while the person in the back wears a plaid shirt and a cap. They are paddling towards a massive, steep cliff covered in dense, vibrant green tropical vegetation. The water is exceptionally clear, reflecting the sky and the surrounding greenery. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic, suggesting a tropical location like Palawan, Philippines.

The kayaks glide effortlessly through the calm waters.



Every reef and every island has its own unique story

Crystal clear water, tropical vegetation, no in-water stingy things, sensational scenery, hundreds of uninhabited islands, great fish and shark life, birds of every kind, friendly locals, manta rays, whales and dolphins, insane coral quality, kayaks and a seven-day expedition that is guaranteed to make every single one of your friends green with envy. Have I got your attention yet?

There is no doubt in my mind – Palau is heaven on Earth. If you asked Disney animators to create the most beautiful, idyllic, colourful tropical island paradise they could imagine, I am certain they would come up with the bright green mushroom-shaped islands nestled among colourful coral reefs, set in sapphire blue water that are the rock islands of Palau. It has to be seen to be believed, and I've visited no other tropical island destination on the planet that comes close to how beautiful this place is. The idea then of exploring all this under my own steam on a kayak expedition has me jumping for joy!

PALAU BASICS

Palau is the most western island group in Micronesia that comprises thousands of small islands in the western Pacific Ocean. At only seven degrees north of the equator, this is a true tropical playground. To get there from Australia the easiest and most direct way is via Guam, which although is similar in geology and geography to Palau, has been altered beyond repair by the Americans as it remains to this day an important military base. But if you need to visit the biggest K-Mart on earth before you get to your dream holiday location, go right ahead! For me, Guam was merely a stopover.

Once in Palau you arrive in Koror, the nation's capital city that resembles nothing of any other capital city you have been to. It has one main street a few hundred metres long with a mish-mash of department stores, supermarkets, bars and restaurants. And that's it. Despite meeting lots of friendly locals who are amazed to find I am Australian, I quickly discover the real Palau, the one I had been longing to see, exists beyond tiny Koror and I make my way to meet up with Ron Leidich, owner and operator of Planet Blue Kayaking

Tours, all round nice guy, and super knowledgeable about everything Palau... above and below the water.

Instantly I get a good feeling from Ron. You can see in his eyes he loves this place, and he loves adventures. In 1994, Ron, who is an expat American, was on his way to Africa to become a wildlife safari guide and he stopped in Palau for just two days. What he found changed his life forever and he now calls Palau home, along with his wife and two children. "Palau is as close as you can get to nature," says Ron. "We have everything right here, and a little bit of effort has massive pay-offs like undiscovered lakes, the most impressive corals you will find anywhere on the planet and in-water encounters with sperm whales, just to name a few."

If you join one of Ron's kayak expeditions, you won't have to bring anything at all. Regardless of whether you want to explore the rock islands on your own, or with Ron or one of his guides, everything will be supplied, from the kayaks to tents and sleeping equipment, food and cooking utensils, maps and even water. Oh, and Planet Blue Kayak Tours has exclusive access to 12 spectacular camping sites so you will have the whole place to yourself. Whether you are a hardcore sea kayaking expert, or just someone who wants to explore the real Palau, this adventure will suit you perfectly.

ON TOUR

The kayaks and all our gear are loaded onto a six metre open boat, and as we navigate our way out of the harbour between the rock islands of Koror I get my first taste of what Palau looks like from the water. My mind is officially blown and as we pass over coral reefs at 20 knots and I can see the fish swimming below. But it's the sight of the islands themselves that takes my breath away, and we're not yet out of sight of the dock!

After a 10-minute boat ride, we reach our drop-off point about 4km from Koror. Out here there are no signs of civilisation, and all the islands are completely uninhabited, so that sense of true wilderness quickly creeps in. We drop the kayaks into the beautiful clear water, load them up with our gear and jump in. Once the boat has left us we begin to make our way between two tall mushroom-shaped islands and, other than the sounds of our paddles splashing in the water, the ➤



The view from my kayak. I had to take this photo just to remind me how sensationally beautiful this place was.



Palau is crawling with wildlife.

There is no doubt in my mind – Palau is heaven on Earth.



Saltwater Crocodiles are shy in these parts but ever present.



Ron (far right) with Planet Blue staff and their families.



Kayaks packed and ready for another day of adventure.



Dusk in the Pacific Ocean.

These are astoundingly tranquil places that will remain etched in my memory for years to come.

only sounds we can hear are the diverse birdcalls from the canopy above. The water is crystal clear and away from the fringing reefs that surround the islands it turns a deep blue.

For days we slowly meander around and in between the islands at no more than walking pace, taking in all the sights, sounds and colours. We make our way through narrow chasms that separate the islands, and into shallow lagoons that seem to have been cut off from the outside world forever. These are astoundingly tranquil places that will remain etched in my memory for years to come. Every few hours we slip off the kayaks with our snorkelling gear and explore the underwater world. It is every bit as spectacular as the world above and thousands of colourful reef fish, like the shy and exquisite mandarin fish, cling to the most impressive plate corals I have ever seen. Because the water movement is so slight in between the islands, in some places the corals have been allowed to grow to their full potential, unhindered by currents and wave action. The result is magnificent and like nothing I have ever seen before.

There are 72 isolated saltwater lakes in the rock islands, cut off from the surrounding ocean by the uplifting of tectonic plates that created the islands themselves. These are connected by sub-surface tunnels allowing water to move in and out with the tides, but also carry with it fish and coral spawn at certain times of the year. "In essence, these are more impressive than the Galapagos in terms of the diversity of life", explains Ron. "Each is evolutionary and ecologically distinct. They represent 72 completely different habitats and assemblages of species and no two are alike, nor is there anything like this anywhere else on earth."

The most famous of these is Jellyfish Lake which, when lifted out of the ocean, took with it a species of jellyfish that is now unique to the lake. These animals have lost the ability to sting and instead capture sunlight to make sugars thanks to symbiotic algae that live within their tissue. As a result there are millions of trapped jellyfish all living near the surface in what looks like the world's biggest lava lamp. Swimming out to the middle of the lake and being surrounded by millions of jellyfish moving in all directions in a slow hypnotic fashion is surreal beyond belief... but then again, so is all of Palau, and so somehow it makes sense.

Away from the islands we find ourselves on the outer reef that is dominated by iconic pelagic species like manta rays, reef sharks, large schools of fish and much, much, more... and diving is not necessary when the visibility and wildlife is as good as it is just on snorkel. But Palau has a few other surprises as well; for those a little more adventurous Ron has specialised tours on which you can paddle up to and swim with dugong, saltwater crocodiles and even sperm whales.

At the end of each long and fun-filled day we pull up our kayaks onto isolated little beaches as the sun sets over the Pacific Ocean. Here basic huts for cooking and eating have been fashioned out of local vegetation and we set up small



This magical place is the ultimate paddling playground.

tents to sleep in while listening to the waves gently lapping the sand at the water's edge. At the campsites we also get the chance to go spearfishing with the guides for each night's meal, as well as collect coconuts for desert. These nights are the perfect end to the most perfect days.

No matter what kind of outdoor adventures you're in to, you should add Palau to your bucket list. I can't think of a single person on the planet who wouldn't be completely awe struck by this place, and this kayak tour is the cherry on the top of what is now my favourite tropical location.

THE ESSENTIALS

Getting there: Direct flights to Palau can be booked from Manilla, Guam, Taipei, Narita, Korea and Tokyo. The most common route to Palau from Australia is via Guam. United Airlines: www.united.com

The adventure: Contact Planet Blue Kayaking Tours before you book your flights to ensure you plan the adventure that is right for you. This ranges from day trips to multiday expeditions with or without a guide and can include all the gear you need. www.paddlingpalau.net/

More information: Palau is an adventurer's playground. Do your research before you leave and you will have an infinitely better time than if you just arrive and hope for it to all fall in place. www.visit-palau.com/

Kayaking in crystal clear water.



Fellow kayaker Akash loving the living lava lamp that is Jelly Fish Lake.







ADVENTURE | KAUAI, HAWAII

Hidden Corners

You never know what
surprises you might find while
wandering around

Kaua'i, Hawaii's
northernmost landmass

WORDS AND PHOTOS DAVE CAULDWELL

DEEP IN A SWAMPY JUNGLE of twirling vines and face-tickling grass, there lies a path — rarely visible — that leads to a secret place. The jungle has concealed a US\$300,000 manmade wonder for many years. Back in the 1920s, a sugar company diverted water from the Hanalei River by blasting a 1.6km tunnel through the mountainside. The water was siphoned into strategically placed ditches to feed sugar cane crops. Today, an intrepid adventurer (or perhaps just a stupid one — it's a fine line) will pass through a tunnel now long defunct.

I'm in the shadow of one of the wettest places on earth. At 1569m, Mt Wai'ale'ale is drenched annually in nearly 11.5m of rain (on average). A vague and muddy hunting track leads to the tunnel. It crosses creeks and darts through bamboo groves. Ferns scratch, branches poke. Delicious red thimbleberries punctuate the greenery. I'm on my hands and knees crawling some of the way through clusters of bushes. Some sections of the track have washed away. It feels as though I'm pioneering uncharted territory as I wade through head-high grass and peel leaves off my face. And then, after 4km and over two-and-a-half hours, the tunnel appears before me.

WHISPERS IN THE DARK

Foliage drapes over the entrance. It's dead straight and a pinprick of daylight is just discernable at the other end. I strap on my head-torch and step inside, walking in ankle deep water for the next 45 minutes in a tunnel roughly two metres wide and three metres high. Twenty-eight million gallons of water used to surge through here every day.

Halfway in, I switch off the torch and stand in darkness. Two dots of light, each half the size of a five-cent piece, are the only indicators that daylight exists. I try not to think about the colossal weight of the mountain above me. One rockslide would snaffle the light at both entrances. There are few places where I've ever felt so vulnerable yet fascinated at the same time.

I pause near the end of the tunnel, suddenly convinced I can hear voices. After several moments, I deduce it's probably the echo of water droplets. I take a couple of footsteps and hear the voices again. I shine my torch back up the tunnel. Nobody's there. Perhaps, by some quirk of non-linear time, I can hear the voices of tunnel adventurers past. Perhaps the weight of this insane darkness is making me crazy.

A set of railway tracks appears in the water, probably installed to haul debris out of the tunnel during its construction. After a short wade,



Above: Airing stinky hiking feet against the stunning backdrop of the Na Pali coast. Not a bad place for a well-deserved break.

Below: Imposing peaks touched by cloud en route to Kalalau Valley.



I'm belched into a virtually inaccessible section of the Hanalei Valley surrounded by near vertical mountains. A short but poky bush-bash leads to the river where water flows around huge boulders. I strip off and soak in my own private paradise. It's been an effort to get here, and I still have to venture back through the whispering tunnel, but for now I'm utterly immersed in the whirling of clouds around the mountains.

CANYON CAPERS

At 16km long, 1.6km wide and more than 1000m deep, the Waimea Canyon is hardly hidden, yet its vastness means there are plenty of nooks for adventurous souls to explore. I need an inflatable rubber ring to access my next hidden corner, a part of the canyon seen by few. I'm trench bound, hoping to tube down a mini canal of water built by a hydroelectric company

to siphon water from the Waimea River to other parts of the island. Again, my mission is to reach a tunnel. This one is only accessible by swimming or tubing.

Clouds convene in a watercolour assortment of yellows, grays and light purples. Rainbow sticks hook into clouds, appearing as lines rather than arcs. Red clay punctuates the canyon walls amidst verdant greenery. This red volcanic dirt is used by a local T-shirt company to dye clothing; one bucket of red dirt is said to colour 500 shirts.

I descend into the canyon tracking down steep, loose slopes until I'm in its midst. The Waimea River is my chaperone all the way, flowing in and out of forests filled with mosquitoes that are protective of fallen *liliko'i* (passion fruit). As soon as I bend down to put one in my bag, the mozzies cluster around and bite me. This is particularly annoying when I'm crossing the river. They bite me as I take off my shoes. They bite me as I negotiate slippery rocks.

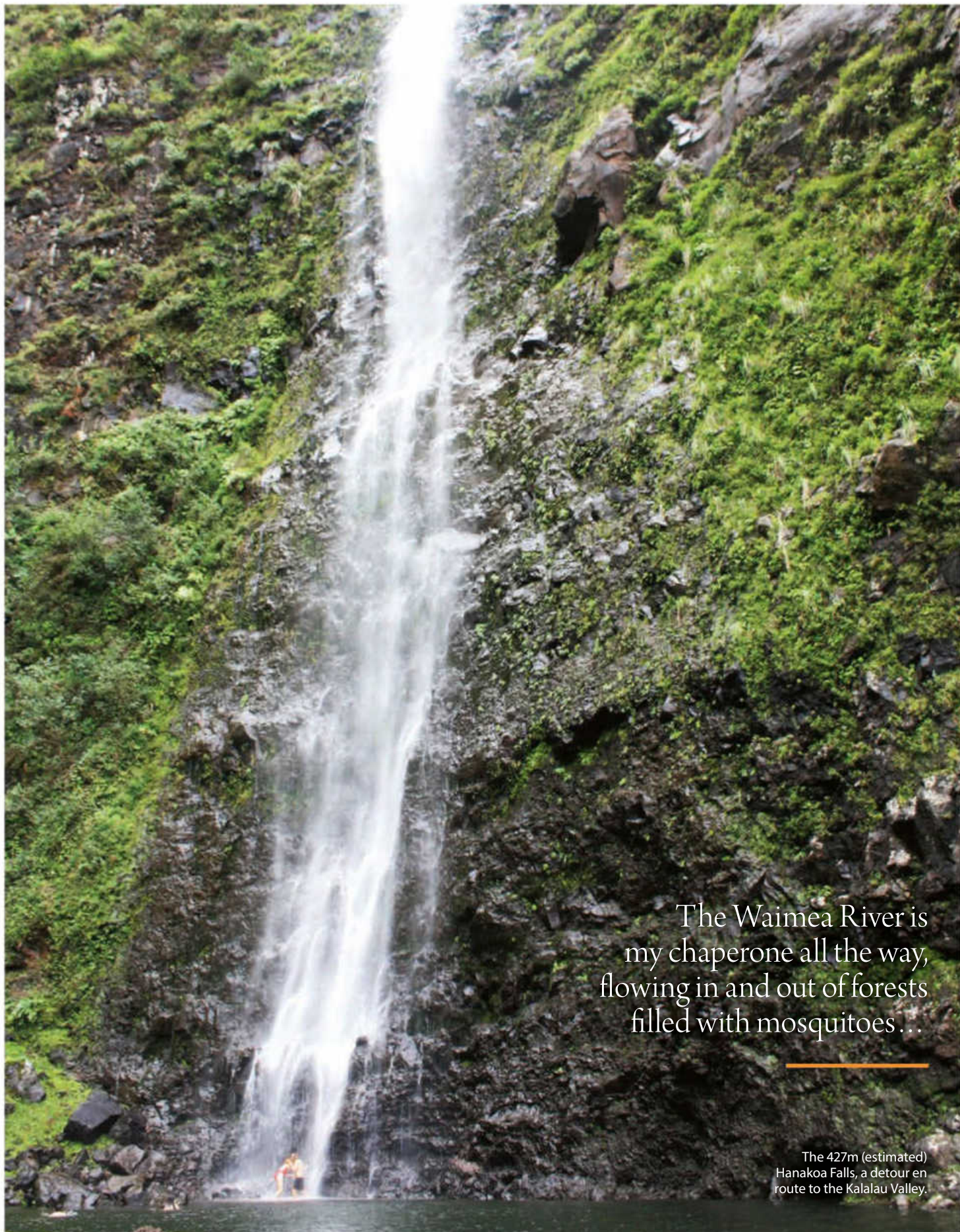
GIANT SPIDER SNATCHERS

You need a bit of luck when it comes to tubing; rubber rings are near impossible to steer. After several wobbly moments of nearly capsizing, I get stuck in a logjam. I eventually wriggle free and continue to ping-pong down the trench. The water isn't that quick, which is just as well because there's a pipe near the end that goes underground for nearly a kilometre before it spews out into the ocean. It has a grille, but I'm not keen to test if I can squeeze through it.

Afternoon sun fades behind the canyon. I can hear a faint wheezing noise. I look above my head but there are no insects, no strange creatures dwelling in the water. Then I realise my ring has a puncture. I'm gradually sinking, buoyant only because of the pressure my body exerts on the remaining air in the ring. This isn't the best time to discover this, as the current is picking up and I'm fast approaching the tunnel.

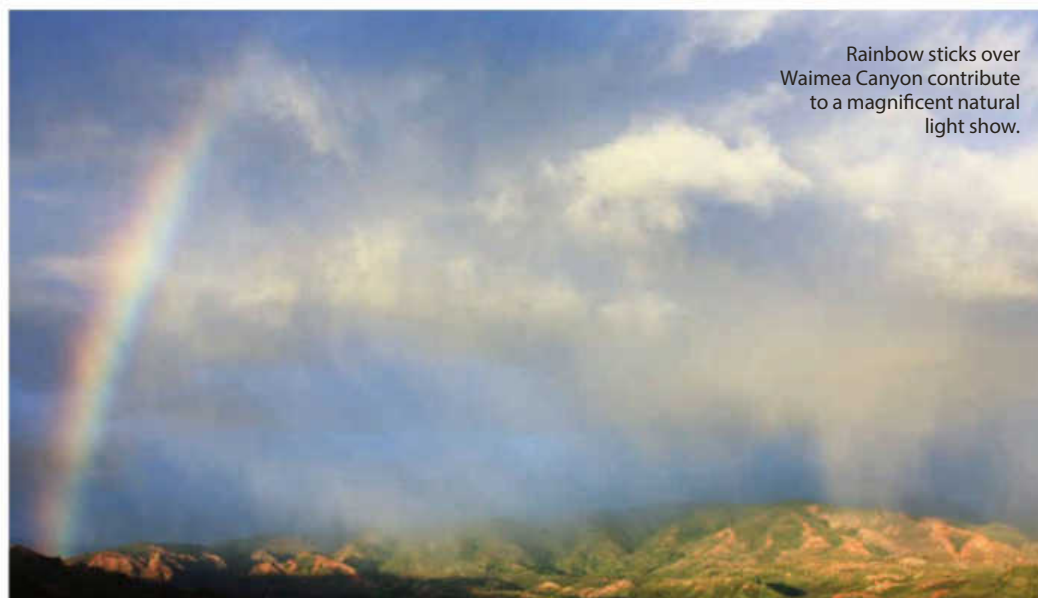
It's claustrophobic in here. There's barely enough room for my head in places. Rocks jag down and I'm forced to occasionally lie flat. Spiders' webs are thick like hessian sacks. The darkness is at it again: I'm having visions of giant spiders bungeeing down and snatching me.

This tunnel is much shorter, but I emerge with the same level of exhilaration. It's starting to get cold — especially since there's now a pool of water lapping my stomach. I come to a fork in the track that now appears beside the trench: this is where I'm supposed to get out. But I can't because the bank is crawling in ants with mean-looking pincers. They bite me every time I try to grab onto a branch, infesting my hands and the ring. ➤



The Waimea River is
my chaperone all the way,
flowing in and out of forests
filled with mosquitoes...

The 427m (estimated)
Hanakoa Falls, a detour en
route to the Kalalau Valley.



Rainbow sticks over Waimea Canyon contribute to a magnificent natural light show.

THE ESSENTIALS

Getting there: Jetstar (www.jetstar.com) flies to Honolulu. Flights start at AU\$800-\$900 return. From Honolulu, catch an internal flight to Kaua'i with Hawaiian Airlines (www.hawaiianairlines.com). One-way tickets start from AU\$115.

Essentials: Take water purification tablets on hikes, as you'll need plenty of water to walk through the humidity. Certain areas of the island require permits to access/camp. Along the Na Pali coast, camping is popular and permits can sell out way ahead of time. See dlnr.hawaii.gov/dsp/parks/kaui

Further Information: The Ultimate Kaua'i guidebook (published by Wizard; www.hawaiiirevealed.com) has a great adventure section, as well as phone apps pertaining to hiking and a series of great maps.

I push further down-trench, wary that I'm fast approaching the pipe that leads to the ocean. The bank isn't super steep, and just a couple of feet high, but trying to haul my sodden self out of a sinking ring with a current carrying me down-trench and ants crawling up my arms isn't easy. As I clamber onto the bank and do a frenetic dance to shake the ants off, I decide that it's time to expand my tunnel vision, time to see the emerald in Kaua'i's evergreen crown.

BALL SHRINKER

Back in the days when Kaua'i was purely tribal, whenever a high chief visited Makana Mountain (a peak along the Na Pali coast immortalised in *South Pacific*), tribe members clambered up the mountain's steep slopes, collecting logs as they went. Darkness fell and the logs were set alight and hurled into the ocean. Trade winds uplifted the flaming logs and the sky was awash with fiery arcs. No doubt the high chiefs were suitably impressed.

Legend tells of a secret route to the Na Pali coast, a steep path called kapea, which is the Hawaiian word for scrotum. Its gradient was sheer enough to shrink the balls of even the sturdiest fire thrower. I can't find it, so instead I'll have to access the Na Pali coast the traditional way, via a track strewn with switchbacks, undulations and detours to 400m-plus waterfalls. This track has roughly 1525m of ascent. Makana Mountain marks the start of my coastal path, at the end of which lies the magical Kalalau Valley.

The Kalalau Valley was once entirely populated. Its settlers left in 1919, lured out of isolation by the curiosity of what lay in Kaua'i's towns. In recent years, the valley again has residents: "hippies" who have built shelters on Kalalau

Beach as well as covert campsites nestled in the jungle. They forage from the land and cultivate jungle gardens. A man on a jet ski also delivers supplies to the settlers.

The valley is part of a state park and authorities deem that the settlers are trespassing. Sporadic helicopter raids occur and rangers raid sites, sometimes destroying them, and fining anybody who doesn't have a permit to camp, which is everybody who is here long term. The rangers' concern is rubbish. They've become aerial garbage-people, cleaning up after settlers.

NYMPH OF THE FOREST

Under the watchful eye of mammoth, fluted cliffs rising 1500m from the sea, I walk for 19km until I'm standing in the Kalalau Valley. I'm keen to find the clandestine camps of valley settlers and get a taste of valley life. I follow a couple of false leads along dried-up creek beds tangled with bush, until I spot some faint tracks leading down to a river. I cross on stepping stones, picking up another faint track on the opposite bank. I weave and duck amongst trees. There's no discernable track now; I'm following my senses.

I spy a hammock in the bushes. A man lies in it reading a book. His demeanour isn't friendly so I leave him to it, continuing through the mini-settlement before coming out onto a deserted camp. Blackened saucepans, jars of fermented fruit, bread knives, tarps and dream catchers handmade from jungle debris: forgotten items left to rot.

I come out into a clearing dominated by a huge tree, an indicator that I've reached the intersection of the so-called Hippy Highway. A topless woman appears out of nowhere, her breasts hidden by long wavy hair and a carefully

positioned sarong. She's a bespectacled forest nymph with sparkling eyes.

This is Sylvie. She's been in the valley for five weeks, driven here by the incessant nature of a nine-to-five job that short-circuited her. She's here to recalibrate, as are a lot of people who come here to reconnect symbiotic circuits fused by the urgency of city life. This is a place for self-reflection, where solitude breeds epiphanies. This valley is a vortex. It feels timeless, as if it was the blueprint for Eden.

Sylvie takes me for a walk in the direction of her campsite. I ask her about life alone in the valley as a woman. She feels safe here, embraced in the valley's midst. The people here respect personal space.

We stumble upon a jungle garden. Taro grows in ponds. Spinach, guavas and grapefruits are also abundant. There's a cave replete with pestle and mortar, big enough for a person to sit inside and grind away. There's also a shrine to Mother Earth, a spiral stone circle that culminates in a central post. It's an offering of love for Gaia.

Sylvie leads me to a watering hole. I float in the river while rain pitter-patters. My body is weightless, at the whim of a gentle current. I close my eyes and become the current. I can feel the muck of the outside world washing away, everything stagnant that I brought into this valley flowing out towards the sea. This water is cleansing the hidden corners within myself, those aspects unheard amongst the noise of everyday life.

I walk invigorated back to my cliff-top camp through the enchanted forest and watch as sunset extinguishes the day, excited at the prospect of what secret pocket of this gorgeous island I'll stumble across tomorrow.

The ruggedly breathtaking
Na Pali Coast.

Legend tells of a secret route
down to the Na Pali coast,
a steep path called kapea, which is
the Hawaiian word for scrotum.

No ball-shrinking path here:
searching for the kapea to
access the Na Pali coast.





Paddle time

Welcome to Paddle Time. Paddling is one of *AG Outdoor's* core activities and it's easy to see why: paddling gives direct access to nature, offering a different perspective on water-borne adventures. With Australia's massive coastline, and an equally large number of rivers and lakes, it's not surprising that every third vehicle you see on the roads has a type of watercraft attached, as people head out in search of adventure in or on the Big Blue.

A PADDLER'S BUCKETLIST

WORDS PAT KINSELLA



Team based
paddle events up
the fun factor.

CLASH OF THE PADDLES

What: Weekend-long festival of mixed-craft ocean paddling

When: June 2016 (TBC)

Where: Hamilton Island, Qld

Why: Because this is a celebration of ocean paddling in all its fantastic forms. It began life in the 1980s, as an infamous outrigger meeting called the Hamilton Cup, but has evolved into something much bigger and more inclusive, with events for everyone from ski racers and SUP yoga fans, through to drum-thumping dragon boat racers.

Events include a 25km downwind surfski race through the Whitsundays between Lindeman and Hamilton islands, but the marquee race remains the titanic 42km OC6 showdown that brings the



COTP to a huge finish on the Sunday (when the parties start). The event (and the location) attracts a stellar field of elites, and the island is taken over by paddlers for the whole weekend.

Suitable for: Intermediate and advanced OC, surfski, oceanski and SUP paddlers.

How much: ??? Pat finding out

More: www.hamiltonisland.com.au/sports-events/clash-of-the-paddles

Whether you're looking for a fun experience or a tough challenge, signing up for a competitive paddling event can be a great way of giving yourself a fixed point to focus on, and to base your fitness and skills training around.

No matter what kind of paddling you're into, Australia has a wealth of iconic races that anyone can enter. But be aware: many demand significant levels of technical ability and physical fitness. Forewarned is forearmed, so here's our guide to the country's biggest, best and most bizarre paddling events that all kayakers and canoeists will want to add to their CVs.

The Hawkesbury Canoe Classic is one of Australia's most popular paddle events.



HAWKESBURY CANOE CLASSIC

What: 111km overnight mixed-craft river race

When: 24 October 2015

Where: Hawkesbury River, NSW

Why: A moonlit classic with a 38-year history, this event sees 600 canoeists and kayakers set off at 4pm on Saturday from Windsor and pass through 21 safety checkpoints during the night as they negotiate a 111km course along the magnificent Hawkesbury River to Brooklyn.

The course record is 7 hours 11 minutes. Individuals and teams can compete, and the race has thus far raised \$4 million for medical research.

Suitable for: Intermediate and advanced paddlers.

How much: \$111

More: www.canoeclassic.asn.au



THE DOCTOR

What: 27km downwind open ocean paddle

When: 28-29 November 2015

Where: Perth, WA

Why: One of the most exciting ocean events on the calendar, the Doctor (named after the cooling breeze that sweeps across Fremantle most summer afternoons) annually attracts the world's very best ski, outrigger and board paddlers. The course spans 27km of open-ocean between Rottnest Island and Sorrento Beach in Perth, with the direction of the race decided according to wind conditions on the weekend.

The Doctor typically takes place on a Saturday, but the event is spread over two days to allow for the best ocean racing conditions, and the main race can be shifted to Sunday if that looks more favourable. A number of other events take place on the surrounding weekends, including Fenn West Coast Downwind and Mandurah Duel.

The Doctor, in WA, involves an open ocean crossing from Rottnest Island to Sorrento Beach in Perth.



Suitable for: Experienced surfski, oceanski, OC and SUP paddlers
How much: \$100
More: www.oceanpaddler.com/events/the-doctor/

BRIDGE TO BEACH

What: Open water 11km mixed-craft paddle
When: March 2016 (TBC)
Where: Sydney, NSW
Why: Because it's a challenging – but accessible and fun – event with a genuinely iconic backdrop. After assembling at Blues Point Reserve, participants line up for the start directly beneath Sydney Harbour Bridge, before paddling out to the ocean, past the world famous Sydney Opera House. Following the northern shores of Sydney Harbour, with views of Taronga Zoo, Bradleys Head and Clifton Gardens, they paddle past South and North Head on their way to the finish at magnificent Manly Wharf. Single, double and quad craft can participate, and a wide range of boats take part.
Suitable for: Intermediate and advanced ski, kayak, OC and SUP paddlers.
How much: \$60 (individual, early entry), \$70 (individual, standard entry)
More: www.oceanpaddler.com/events/bridge-to-beach/

HEKILI GREAT BARRIER REEF OCEAN CHALLENGE

What: 45km downwind iron-distance marathon
When: June 2016 (TBC)
Where: Tropical North Queensland
Why: Because this monster is Australia's longest competitive annual one-day ocean paddling race

No matter what kind of paddling you're into, Australia has a wealth of iconic races that anyone can enter.

– a genuine test of fitness, endurance and skill. And because it travels along the inside of the Great Barrier Reef, skirting the tropical coast between Yorkeys Knob, just north of Cairns, all the way to Four Mile Beach in Port Douglas.

It began as an outrigger orientated race, but now welcomes ski paddlers too, and even a few hardy SUPers. Celebrating its sixth year, this race has already become a downwind classic, high on a lot of elite paddlers' bucketlists.

Suitable for: Advanced surfski, oceanski, OC and (very strong) SUP paddlers.
How much: TBC
More: www.hekilioutrigger.com.au/; www.aocra.com.au

AVON RIVER DESCENT

What: A unique 2-day, 124km downriver race, contested by paddlers and powerboaters
When: August 2016 (TBC)
Where: Avon and Swan rivers, WA
Why: Because it's one of the most eccentric and interesting paddling events in the world, with a variety of paddle and powercraft spending a weekend negotiating a twisty and often technical 124km course along the Avon and Swan rivers.

The race has come a long way since the inaugural event in 1973, when there were just 49 competitors, no rules, no officials, no checkpoints and few spectators – and now it's a must-do for adventurous Australian paddlers.

Suitable for: Intermediate and advanced kayakers, ski paddlers, power boaters and nutters.
How much: \$240 (single kayak/ski, early bird)/\$280 (single kayak/ski, standard)
More: www.avondescend.com.au

OUTLAW GREAT OCEAN PADDLE

What: 25km downwind ocean paddle
When: February 2016 (TBC)
Where: Great Ocean Road, Vic
Why: This exciting and challenging downwinder evolved from the Graeme Long Memorial Paddle. It travels along 25km of dramatic Australian coastline, hugging the cliffs and coves that line the beginning of the Great Ocean Road, from Port Roadknight in Anglesea to Fishermans Beach in Torquay (or vice-versa, depending on ocean conditions), past picturesque Point Addis and Point Danger.

Experienced paddlers harness the mighty swell that goes on to break as surf on Bells Beach, Jan Juc and Winkipop. A half-distance version is also available.

Suitable for: Intermediate and experienced surfski, oceanski, OC and SUP paddlers.
How much: \$90 (single ski, earlybird)/\$100 (single ski, standard)
More: www.greatoceanpaddle.eventbrite.com/; www.peakadventure.com.au



The Lea Extreme is packed with amazing whitewater runs.

THE LEA EXTREME (FORMERLY THE TEVA LEA)

What: An annual grassroots whitewater weekend-long event featuring a unique race along a naturally flowing river.

When: 26 September 2015

Where: River Lea, near Moina, northwest Tas

Why: Going into its 13th year, and now run by the Tasmanian Canoe Club, this is a classic gathering of kindred river spirits – an eclectic collection of individuals with one common denominator: a love of wild water. Local legends, international visitors and big names in the Australian whitewater scene are attracted to this event, but it's welcoming to all-comers.

The weekend kicks off with paddlers taking on a descent of a technical stretch of the Lea River, featuring a series of grade III and IV rapids with names like Big Drop, Screaming Plastic Surgeon, Proctologists Twist and Ankle Breaker. The format is unique: paddlers are paired into teams of two and released in staggered waves; the

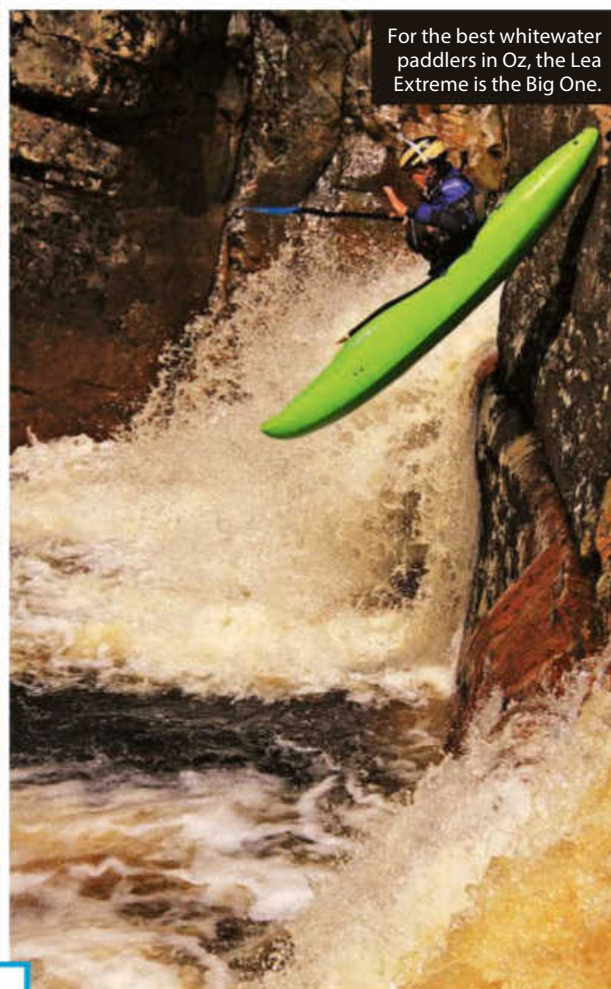


clock stops when the slower boater crosses the finish line. So, unlike boater-cross, where competing paddlers will attempt to nubble each other as they run the rapids, at the Lea it's all about team spirit and co-operation. The prize is the 'Bull', an iconic trophy.

Suitable for: Experienced whitewater kayakers

How much: ??? Pat finding out

More: www.tcc.canoe.org.au;
www.facebook.com/Leaextremerace



For the best whitewater paddlers in Oz, the Lea Extreme is the Big One.

YMCA MASSIVE MURRAY PADDLE (FORMERLY THE MURRAY MARATHON)

What: A five-day, 404km mixed-craft marathon

When: 25-29 November 2015

Where: Murray River, Yarrowonga-Swan Hill, NSW-Vic border

Why: The southern hemisphere's longest paddling race, this 46-year old event sees participants take on a 400km-plus course in canoes, kayaks, surfskis and even on stand-up paddleboards. It's billed as an adventure, rather than a hardcore competitive race, and is open to teams and individuals of all levels.

To go the distance you will need a high level of fitness, decent paddling technique for your craft of choice and the ability to fight through fatigue. The event has a great social side too.

Suitable for: Fit individual kayakers, canoeists, ski and SUP paddlers, and teams.

How much: \$525 p/p (early bird) or \$625 p/p (standard)

More: www.massivemurraypaddle.org.au



The ocean ski race of the Clash of the Paddles is a great challenge.



The Lea Extreme is chock-full of fantastic whitewater action.



Miss Adventure

www.missadventure.com.au @missadventure_

MissAdventure is a community for women that charge the adventure life. This is where we share inspiration, gear, travel ideas and more. We don't care about your age, background or fitness level. If you have the wanderlust spirit, you're one of us.

WORDS CAROLINE PEMBERTON

PHOTOS TIM THATCHER





The last sun on the summit of Mt William.

Two feet and a heartbeat

You don't need good weather to enjoy all that this awesome new hiking track in the Victorian Grampians has to offer

"When you have worn out your shoes, the strength of the sole leather has passed into the fibre of your body. I measure your health by the number of shoes you have worn out. The richest man is he who pays the largest debt to his shoemaker." – Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1851

WALKING, IT'S THE lifeblood of adventurers. It's what takes us to those breathtaking destinations, those wild corners, those epic mountain ranges, the remote beaches and fresh air summits. As the saying goes, you just need two feet and a heartbeat.

Rewind a few months to the middle of the Victorian winter and I find myself clawing up through relentless sideways rain, buffeted by 90km/h winds, shaking to the bones. I'm freezing, wet and exhausted. Visibility is low and I can't see a metre in front of me. I stumble numerous times catching myself on moss-covered boulders. The only thing keeping me on the trail are fluorescent

arrows that appear just when I think I'm lost. Being up here, disorientated and off track, would be very dangerous indeed. On the inside, I feel like a howling toddler refusing to go any further, but on the outside I place one wet foot in front of the other and get on with it.

Welcome to the glorious Grampians Peaks Trail, a new trek that will soon be hailed as one of Australia's premier multiday hikes. Just a three-hour drive from Melbourne it runs 144km from Mt Zero in the North through to the township of Dunkeld in the South. Set in stunning layered sandstone it tells a story that's 400 million years old with its spectacular craggy peaks jutting through open

grassy veldts. One day it can be hot with a cloudless sky, the next rolling storm clouds whip and howl delivering freezing conditions.

The Grampians is an outdoor enthusiast's mecca with world-class rock climbing, fantastic mountain biking and a multitude of hiking options from gentle day hikes to the wilder frontiers of the new Grampians Peaks Trail.

The full 13-day length of the trail is still yet to be opened, but Section One is already drawing eager hikers from around the country. It's a very manageable three-day, two-night expedition that starts in the sleepy town of Halls Gap, winds its way up through the Wonderland ranges to the



The awesome views along this walk make all the effort worthwhile.

Adventure can't be bought, it has to be earned and won – and if it was easy, it wouldn't be so addictive.

climbed the landscape became more exposed, the cloud and mist hanging in the valley started to join the sky and I was quickly surrounded by thick wet grey fog. The higher I went, the worse it got. I layered up just as a deluge of rain set in for good. It was blowing sideways, pushing at me and I remember thinking how seriously grateful I was to the inventor of Gore-Tex. Now and then I was forced to take shelter under rock overhangs and in shallow caves to wait for lulls in the weather.

It's times like these when we all have a love/hate relationship with adventure, wishing we were back in bed, all warm and cosy – anywhere but in the cold and wet elements. I've considered this paradox many times and surmise that adventure can't be bought, it has to be earned and won – and if it was easy, it wouldn't be so addictive.

There was no 360-degree view when I reached the summit of Mount Rosea; I stood above the clouds, alone, but with an understanding of what is meant by 'It's the journey, not the destination'.

And then the grey fog lifted a little, and just for a minute, the view was revealed to me: a glimpse of sunlight breaking through the clouds and hitting the sandstone walls, lighting them a bright orange across a green valley. I realised that I love adventure so much because of these precious moments, the ones that give life its spice and me my strength of character, and with that I stepped off the summit and made my way back down the mountain.

Pinnacle before dropping back to the valley for camp and then a hike to stunning 360-degree views from the 1009m summit of Mount Rosea.

Before I set off I spoke to the local rangers and guides at the Brambuk National Park and Cultural Centre to get an idea of the conditions I would face if the weather turned (which it did). I asked them where I might run into trouble, water availability, and the campground facilities. They gave me invaluable knowledge and tips, which I later relied upon. I also let them know I was out there and what my plan was, just in case.

Then I drove up to the highest lookout, on Mount William, and stepped upon the summit not only to look over the scale of the landscape I was planning to hike through, but also to get an idea of the exposure. While it was calm and temperate in the valley below, on the summit the wind was cold. This quick recce was informative and helped me plan my upcoming trek. I concentrated on the essentials: plenty of water, food, a first aid kit, an emergency space blanket, waterproof matches, whistle and compass.

As morning broke, I dressed in layers: merino thermals, wet and windproof shells, insulating but breathable mid-layers and a beanie. Admittedly my pack weighed a fair bit more than I would have liked but, after a few days hiking, it simply becomes a part of you.

My first day on the Peaks Trail was tiring but manageable, even though the weather continued to move in, which meant the hike took longer than I expected. By late morning I was standing on the Pinnacle, looking back to Mt William, down the Fyans Valley and out to the rural plains of Victoria.

My first Grampians Peak under my belt.

Following The Pinnacle, I dropped down, out of the wind to the newly established Bugiga Hiker Campground. It's an incredible spot for the night with individual purpose-built elevated tent platforms, which boast unreal views over the mist-filled valley framed by the mountains ahead.

Day 2 was where the real test began. I packed up and set off reasonably early to Mt Rosea, a moderately tricky 16km hike with solid elevation gain. Down in the valley I was deceived into thinking the weather was clearing, but with each metre



The track leading through the Wonderland Ranges.

INSPIRATION

Cyclist Kate Leeming in Africa.

The world on two wheels

15 minutes with an extraordinary, everyday adventurer



Meet Kate Leeming, an inspirational adventure cyclist who will have you wiggling into a pair of bike nicks and hitting the road by the time you are finished reading this interview.

Incredibly, she has pedalled her way across the width of Africa and become the first woman to cycle unsupported across 'new' Russia, as well as clocking up more than 25,000km around Australia. She's now preparing to make the first bicycle crossing of Antarctica via the South Pole.

Kate is a country girl who grew up on a wheat and sheep farm near Northam in Western Australia, and is one of four children. She was always set to make ripples in life and, after finishing her education with a Bachelor's degree in Physical Education, she took off travelling and found herself in Europe where her career as an adventurer really started to evolve as she took up cycling.

It was also in the UK where she found her love of 'Real Tennis' – a sport that combines tennis, squash and chess and can be attributed as the game from which racquet sports evolved. Within two years she had turned professional, eventually reaching her best ranking of world number two. Talk about a kick-arse athlete.

Kate, tell us about your love of adventure?

I always wanted to travel and I have always been inspired by the feats of many early Australian and polar explorers, but never could have dreamed about what I could achieve on a bike beyond a cycle tour through France or Italy. After an initial small trip in Ireland, little trips led to more

ambitious journeys and over the space of a couple of years I clocked around 15,000km through Europe as a personal discovery.

This is where I found my passion. I loved the process of planning and then bringing a line on a map to life. I found that travelling by bike gives an intimate connection with the people and the land and that it gives an incredible sense of place; a perspective of how the world fits together. These are my key intrinsic motivations.

While I was planning my first major expedition across Russia in 1993, I met polar explorer Robert Swan, the first person in history to have walked to both the North and South poles. Robert taught me that there was much more value to what I was doing than simply personal satisfaction. The purpose of my Trans-Siberian Cycle expedition, a 13,400km ride from St Petersburg to Vladivostok, was to aid the Children of Chernobyl. Ever since I have used my expeditions to make a difference to the people and places that I travel through.

Your next goal is to cycle across the Antarctic continent via the South Pole? What does that expedition entail?

Breaking the Cycle South Pole will be a supported bicycle journey across the Antarctic continent from coast to coast via the South Pole. The first of a kind, it's an 1850km journey that will take approximately six weeks during which time I will be exposed to temperatures of between -10°C and -40°C, and altitudes of up to 3000m. Engineered by Christini Technologies, my custom-made bicycle is the first all-wheel drive fatbike.

FUEL



When you are hiking, you need energy-dense food that is small, compact, healthy and full of nutrients. With this grain-free batch of banana muffins at the top of your rucksack, you'll be everyone's favourite trail buddy.



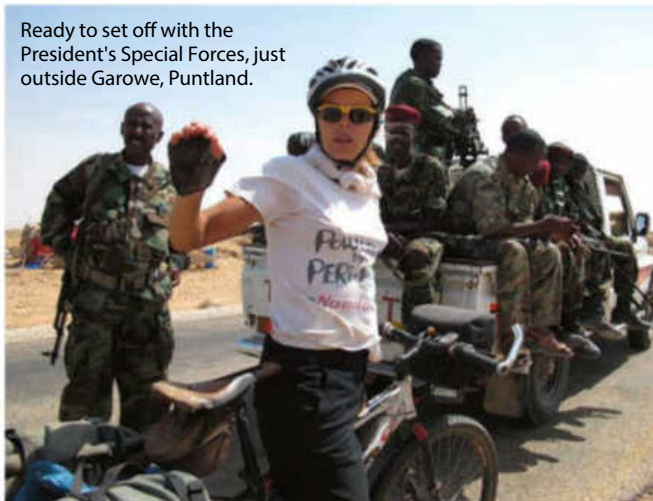
TRAIL BANANA MUFFIN

Ingredients

4 ripe bananas (mashed)
4 eggs
1/2 cup coconut flour
2 tbsp honey
2 tbsp coconut oil
1 tsp baking powder
2 tbsp shredded coconut
1 tbsp chia seeds
Pinch cinnamon
Pinch nutmeg

1. Preheat oven to 175°C. In a large mixing bowl, combine all the wet ingredients and then add the coconut flour, shredded coconut, chia seeds and spices, and mix thoroughly.
2. Line a muffin tray with either a muffin case or some coconut oil and place mixture into moulds. Pop in oven for 20 minutes or until golden brown.
3. Cool on a cooling rack and enjoy.

Ready to set off with the President's Special Forces, just outside Garowe, Puntland.



Training for "Breaking the Cycle", South Pole.
Photo: Phil Coates

To give me the best chance of successfully completing my mission I will be accompanied by a world-class team including Eric Philips, Australia's most experienced polar explorer, and renowned Swiss documentary maker Claudio von Planta, best known for his work with Ewan McGregor and Charley Boorman on their motorbike journeys *Long Way Round* and *Long Way Down*.

This time I will be using my expedition to raise funds for and awareness about HIV/AIDS in Africa (via Charity Miles, (RED) and the Global Fund) as a response to one of the issues I saw during my previous *Breaking the Cycle in Africa* expedition; 22,000km from Senegal to Somalia.

When you achieve your goal, what will it mean for you?

I believe that performing these expeditions is an absolute privilege and there will no doubt be some celebration of the achievement, but then I will be straight in to the next phase of the *Breaking the Cycle* project – analysing, documenting and promoting the story in order to share it so others will be inspired and motivated and can to learn from it.

As making the objectives of raising funds and awareness for AIDS in Africa, contributing to education and encouraging others, women and girls in particular, to aim high and achieve their dreams, are just as important, I will be most content if, on completing the goal, I have made a significant impact via these outreach initiatives.

What would you tell other women who want to test themselves and take on an expedition of grand scale?

To have a go! Growing up I was successful at several sports and enjoyed cycling for fitness, but I

couldn't have imagined what I could achieve on a bike. Initially I did not have the confidence or knowhow to do what I do. I started cycling as my way of experiencing Europe – a small trip with a friend in Ireland led to longer and more intricate journeys through Europe. So my advice is to explore, to find your passion. By all means prepare thoroughly, but those plans need to be realistic and adaptable for a successful adventure. Try something small first and see where those first steps can take you.

What have you learnt along your journey?

I have learned that, with the right vision, a realistic and adaptable plan, the ability to gain the support of a capable and appropriate team and serious amount of determination, commitment, persistence and hard work, it is possible to achieve what many would deem impossible.

It is essential to focus on the question 'How do I get through?' rather than 'What will stop me?'.

What are the challenges you've overcome?

Contrary to what many might think, travelling by bicycle is relatively safe because people respect you for making such an effort to explore their part of the world and usually deem you to be a strong character and an interesting person. It is also a very humble form of travel.

I have however been faced with many potential crises during almost 80,000km of bicycle travel – avoiding Al-Shabab extremist militants travelling under cover on the final few days across Puntland, Somalia; travelling with two bulletproof vehicles and a full military unit after a shooting incident in the Republic of Congo; avoiding snakes and crocodile-infested waters in northern Australia; surviving chaotic city traffic and dealing with the

odd person who wants to take advantage. In every case it is about keeping a cool head, not panicking, staying alert and keeping a low profile.

Large scale expeditions are expensive. How could the everyday person overcome that?

You begin by getting out there, gaining experience and a track record. I have never been financially well-off, my achievements have all been created from my vision, persistence, dedication and hard work... I may be a skilled expedition cyclist, but everything else I have had to learn and develop to make these larger expeditions and projects successful – networking skills, presenting, writing, marketing, photography, filming and so on. It's really important to honour everything you promise to build your brand and reputation.

How do you manage risk?

Managing risks always starts with researching the regions I plan to travel through, identifying the major risks and then devising an adaptable management plan. In Russia, Greg Yeoman and I were always accompanied by a Russian cyclist to help with language, steer us away from potential danger, help with changing money and negotiating places to stay. In Australia, it was more about carrying enough water and food in remote regions... For Antarctica I have put people around me to learn polar survival and support me on a journey that will test physical and mental limits.

What is something that people don't tell you about life on expedition?

Mostly, I think people don't imagine how much extra work there is to do while on expedition to make it flow – writing, planning ahead and communicating as I go. In Africa, I would always be last to bed, preparing for the next day, writing my journal, preparing emails for my team to send while I am on the road, doing maintenance and so on. My days off the bike tended to be so hectic that I was glad to get back on the road again.

It is essential to focus on the question 'How do I get through?' rather than 'What will stop me?'.



Being correctly equipped is vital for the South Pole expedition.
Photo: Phil Coates

What does it feel like for you when you do achieve your goal?

There's usually a whole range of thoughts and emotions flooding through my mind, so overwhelming that I almost feel numb. These undertakings require so much physical, mental and emotional energy and I have given my all. There is certainly a deep personal satisfaction and I always feel very proud that myself and my team has successfully completed the mission, but it usually takes a while to sink in and put everything in perspective.

Do you ever experience an anticlimax after such success and how do you cope with that?

Cycling six to eight hours most days for almost a year changes me physically – my body gets used to processing vast quantities of food and at the end of every day I am on a high (from exercise-induced endorphins that circulate through my system). Once the excitement of finishing a journey and successfully achieving the mission wears off, readjusting to a 'normal' life is quite difficult. There's usually a lot of pressure to start generating an income and at the same time, begin the much longer process of analysing and documenting the expedition to produce a book, documentary and make presentations... I've learned to remain positive by staying busy, only keeping good food in the house, doing light exercise (to help me recover physically) and spending time with some good friends.

What's your best adventure advice?

Take your time in developing the mission. What you are passionate about? How can you make the most of your skills and abilities? Research extensively to work out what is possible, and work a degree of adaptability into your detailed plan. If you wholeheartedly believe in the mission, and have a realistic, flexible plan, when times are challenging, this belief will be what pulls you through.

REVIEWS

Gear we adore



ANHU SUGARPINE WP IN DEEP TEAL

\$249 www.anhu.com.au

When you first pick these colourful boots up from amongst the brown, grey and black ones lining the wall of your local outdoor shop, you'll probably think they look a little too nice and feel too light to handle the rough stuff. But before you put those babies down, think again.

The Anhu Sugarpines are athletic-inspired boots. Yes, they're sleek and lightweight, but they're also fully waterproof and breathable, and the Vibram rubber outsoles provide great traction on all kinds of surfaces, slippery or dry. I found them comfortable from the first wear and they didn't need the expected break-in time.

They are technically surprising for such a lovely little boot.

THE NORTH FACE BANCHEE 50

\$340 www.thenorthface.com.au

When you are doing a multiday hike the most important part of your kit is your rucksack.

You need something lightweight, durable and most importantly something that fits you really well. The North Face Banchee 50 is not only a great looking pack in vibrant aqua, it is also supremely comfortable thanks in part to its OPTIFIT adjustment system for female backs and hips. With no shortage of pockets for sunscreen, maps, water bottles, snacks and odd bits and bobs, it's perfect for a foray into the backcountry or a spectacular one- to two-day hike in the Grampians. With a 50L capacity, it's not too big, it's not too small, it's just right.



ADVENTURESS SKIN CARE (WEEKENDER PACK)

\$25 www.goAdventuress.com

Sometimes you find a product so simple you can't believe you didn't think of it yourself.

Adventuress is a line of all-natural skincare specifically created to address the needs of active, outdoorsy people, but where it really stands out from the crowd is in its intelligent packaging.

Using small individual pads you can quickly swipe on your cleanser, moisturiser or sunscreen while you are on the go. It's perfect for hikers trying to reduce their pack weight, it's squishable for travellers who want to avoid the dread of exploded toiletries, and it's ideal for trail runners, triathletes, climbers, cyclists, marathoners and adventure racers who need to reapply that all important sunscreen without stopping and getting greasy hands.

The skincare impregnated into the pads is all-natural and top quality, comprising anti-aging and anti-inflammatory properties to protect you against the harshness of our outdoor Aussie lifestyles.

No more excuses; you've got to take care of your skin out there!

(Always take the used packaging with you for proper disposal post-adventure).





Bike Lane

The humble bicycle is still one of the world's most efficient modes of transport, and it's a great device to explore the planet.

Whether you've been riding all your life or you're just starting your own two-wheeled adventure, the team at *AG Outdoor* have you covered for gear reviews, trip news and more.





The Enduro course was challenging for the riders.

Crank it up!

World's coolest mountain bike festival meets New Zealand's most awesome mountain bike town. Good times ensue

If you even have the vaguest interest in riding mountain bikes, you must go to Rotorua, New Zealand. The end.

Okay, there probably needs to be a few more words to flesh out the story, but in a nutshell, that's essentially it. Nestled towards the top of New Zealand's north island, and almost on the same latitude as Sydney, the small city of Rotorua, renowned for its volcanic pools, thermal springs, sulphur ponds and friendly locals, also does a mean line in mountain bike trails.

For a place no bigger than Ballarat or Bathurst, Rotorua punches way above its weight when it comes to hosting events. The Paymark Xterra, the 3D Multisport, ultramarathons, 24-hour mountain bike races and more all call Rotorua home – and that's just over a two-month period!

We're here to check out another addition to the calendar; Crankworx is making its first overseas sojourn after a successful 11-year stint at the Canadian ski resort of Whistler, bringing its multi-MTB festival format to the southern

hemisphere for the first of three visits.

As traditional forms of mountain bike racing decline in participants and spectators, Crankworx gives centre stage to newer, more spectator-friendly events like slopestyle, dual speed and style, downhill and enduro. The enduro event in particular has been a massive hit, with the 400 entry spots for the Endurance World Series-rated event grabbed in just three minutes!

"New Zealanders are passionate about mountain biking and we know how to have a good time! I'm stoked to show the world our scene," says Kelly McGarry, New Zealand's leading freeride exponent and the man behind the massive jumps and stunts adorning the hill at the Skyline Park venue.

The event has brought out a veritable who's who of mountain biking's best and fastest riders from all over the globe. I spot at least three current-decade world champions within half an hour of being on site, not to mention the top 10 or 12 proponents of each respective discipline and a host of the sport's genuine celebrities. Aussies, of course, feature prominently, but two key riders, downhiller Sam Hill and current enduro world champ Jared Graves, are suffering training

The event has brought out a veritable who's who of mountain biking's best and fastest riders from all over the globe.

NEWS & PRODUCT BRIEFS



GOPRO HERO4 SESSION

\$500 (approx) gopro.com

The latest addition to GoPro's action camera range is almost 50 per cent smaller than the regular GoPro Hero4 Black, but it does lose a little bit of functionality (no 4k or 2.7k recording, for example) and of course there is no playback screen. It does, however, feature a double mike; a first for any GoPro.

GARMIN EDGE 520

From \$399 www.garmin.com

If you use Strava to track your cycling activities, the new Edge 520 from Garmin can help you track your performance even more closely. Upload a section from the web-based cycling program and you can monitor how you're going in real time on the full-colour screen. All the usual GPS functionality is present, too.



HIGHLAND FLING

wildhorizons.com.au/highland-fling

One of the iconic endurance mountain bike races returns for its 11th running this November. The Highland Fling comes in three flavours; the Full Fling (110km), the Half Fling (55km) and new for 2015 the Some Fling (23km). Run around the gorgeous Southern Highlands town of Bundanoon, NSW, the event runs on 8 November.

injuries and will have to sit the event out.

The industry is here, too, with bike maker Specialized hosting a global bike launch during the week of the event, and component maker SRAM decking out a large pavilion as a VIP area, complete with a bar, pro mechanic bay and viewing room.

There are now three events around the world, with Rotorua in March, Les 2 Alpes in France in July and the granddaddy of them all, Crankworx Whistler in August. A single events team looks after all three events, ensuring consistency across all three and maintaining a high standard. Even though this is New Zealand's first event, they've hit the ground running, with top-notch live streaming right across the weekend, great commentators and excellent organisation from the front gate to the top of the mountain.

And the crowds have turned out en masse. "It's not a big town, so maybe this is everybody!" one rider was overheard to say, and we'd agree; crowds of between 5000 and 10,000 people dotted the hillside every day of the event, despite a couple of grey and drizzly mornings.

It's a broad-church mountain bike festival for everyone. Lots of families are wandering through the large expo area, there's a lot of dads and kids riding around the venue just taking it all in. There's a KidsWorx event, and even a small pump track that's seeing a load of action from the champs of tomorrow.

Slopestyle is the event that gives Crankworx its unique flavour. Think back to the piles of dirt you might have ridden over as a kid. Now, multiply those by a factor of about, ooh, a thousand, and you're getting the idea. Huge wooden platforms and veritable mountains of dirt are carefully shaped and sculpted into towering structures that defy logic. Riders are dwarfed by the course – until they take to the sky, twisting and flipping their bikes in utterly inconceivable ways tens of metres into the air – and a good 50m from the ground.

It has a language all of its own, too – cork 720s, flat-drop backflips, pump-back to cash roll, opposite truck stops... and they all defy belief.

The contest itself wasn't short on drama, either. The sport's top-ranked rider, American Brandon Semenuk, was ripping practice apart, but binned it in his first of two competitive runs, meaning that he really had to lay it on the line to have any chance of keeping out a host of hungry younger flippers who'd come from all corners of the globe to claim the win.

One of those fearless young men was Canadian Brett Rheeder, a quiet, unassuming guy with a bucketload of style but maybe not the confidence to take it all the way. After laying out a brilliant first run, Rheeder could only wait and watch what Semenuk could do.

Crowds were high over the course of the event.



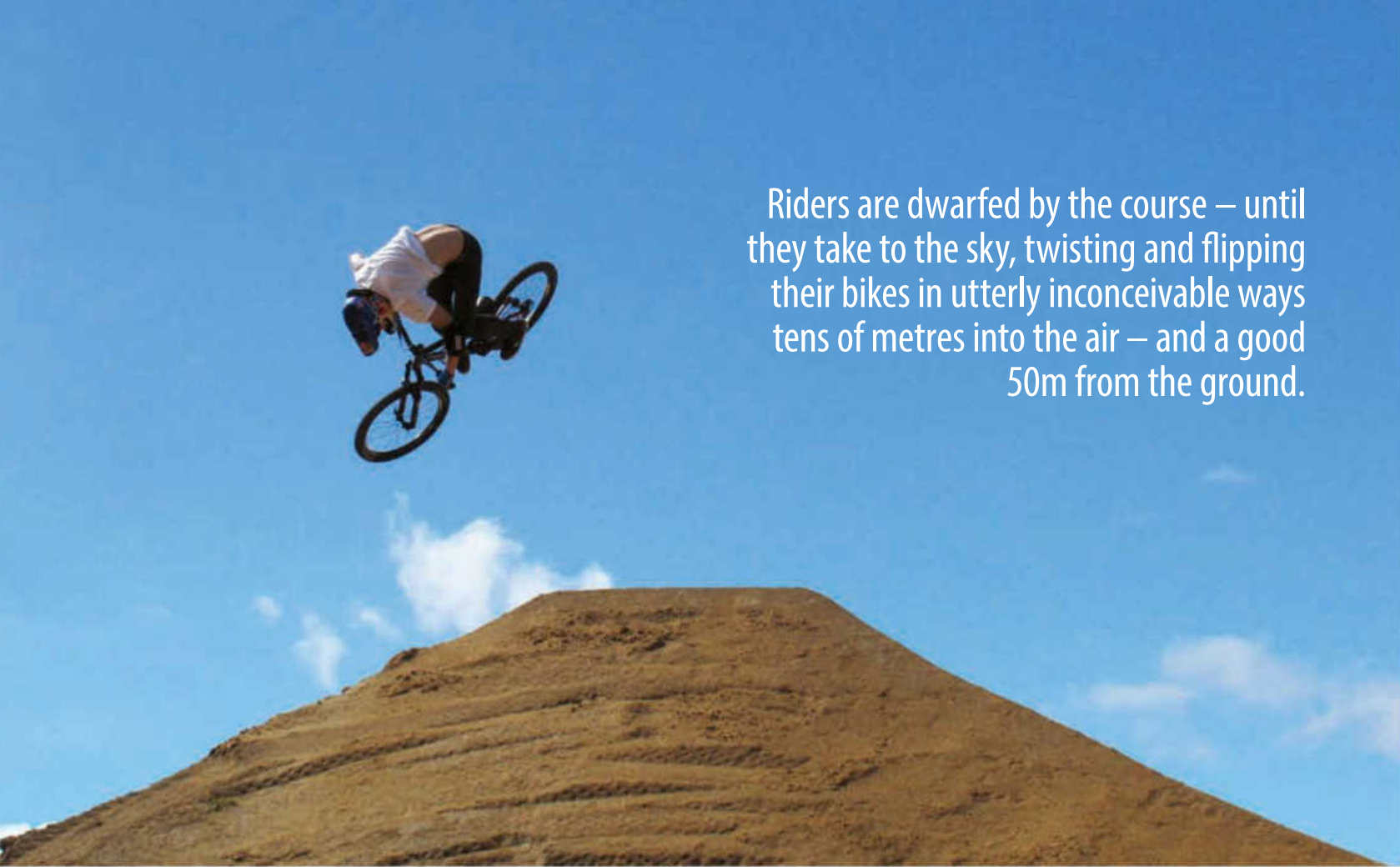
The courses for the various events were built to an exceptional standard.

The answer? Nothing? Reportedly suffering double vision and a tweaked shoulder from his crash, he bailed out on his second run after just one jump, handing a disbelieving Rheeder his first win – and a big fat novelty cheque worth \$10,000. US youngster Nicholi Rogatkin nailed second place, with Belgian Thomas Genon in third.

The enduro event, too, was incredible to watch from start to finish. On tracks that resembled a World Cup-level downhill in spots, the world's fittest and fastest mountain bike athletes kept it upright through insanely tight trails to finish on the downhill course in front of a huge baying crowd. French riders swept the top spots, with Jerome Clementz claiming the men's event and multiple downhill world champ Anne-Caroline Chausson cruising home in the women's race.

As awesome as Crankworx is, though, I have a date with – reputedly – one of the greatest sets of mountain bike trails, not just in New Zealand, or the southern hemisphere, but in the entire world. Known as the Redwoods, the Whakarewarewa Forest is on the outskirts of the town, and hides more than 130km of trails in its vast and varied canopy. A stand of Californian Coast Redwood trees lends the trail network its name, and an amazing place to ride.

Rotorua is a bike-friendly town, with wide verges and not many hills; the Holiday Inn even has a huge bike-locking facility and a bike wash out the front, and had no problem with a soaked Aussie



Riders are dwarfed by the course – until they take to the sky, twisting and flipping their bikes in utterly inconceivable ways tens of metres into the air – and a good 50m from the ground.



The Crankworx enduro event sold out in three minutes.

rider messing up the marbled foyer! The Redwoods are only a five-minute ride away, and I thought there must have been a Crankworx event on, such was the size of the crowd in the adjacent carpark and cafe. There's plenty of room to spread out, though, and with an incredible array of trails to sample, I'm soon out amongst it.

The trails are beautifully maintained and graded

according to difficulty, so I try my hand at a few grade threes to get my eye in. A shuttle service runs up the middle of the park on weekends and during holidays; it's about six bucks a ride if you buy a card of 10. It's well worth the price – you don't pay anything else to use these incredible trails, and by taking the 'cheater's' way up, you're maximising the down time.

The trail network is graded from one through to five, though the 'threes' here are definitely tougher than down at Taupo. Turkish Delight and Gunna Gotta are two examples of mid-grade trails that flatter the novice yet reward the more experienced. Corridor, too, is brilliant fun, and is rated at four. Rose Bank steps up the technical side while funnelling riders through massive redwoods. It's a sensory overload of bermed, packed, flowing mountain bike nirvana. The hardest thing is to keep trying new trails – the one you just rode was usually that good, you just wanted to do it again!

While riders always had a reason to go to Rotorua, the additions of the Crankworx Festival means that you're out of excuses. Dates for the 2016 event haven't been finalised yet, but with Easter in March 2016, we're betting mid-month is the go. So we'll see you there?

ROTORUA FAST FACTS

Population: 65,280

Flights: Air New Zealand flew us direct from Sydney to Rotorua, but this flight has since been cancelled. Instead, fly into Auckland and drive down, especially if you have bikes.

Weather in March: Mid to high teens, a bit of rain around.

Accommodation: Loads, at all price points.

Resources: www.riderotorua.com, www.crankworx.com, www.newzealand.com/au





RIDER PROFILE:



Coming to America

Melbourne bike nut Jesse Carlsson recently won one of the world's toughest cycling races, the Trans America. *AG Outdoor* caught up with a tired victor.

You may have caught a few stages of the Tour de France this year. Run over 3300km and 23 days, it's incredible how the riders can keep backing up day after day to race through all weathers and in all climes.

Well, wait until you see what Jesse Carlsson achieved...

Jesse is the co-owner of a fledgling Melbourne bike company Curve, and he raced – and won – this year's Trans America Bike Race, a solo event that traverses the entire width of the United States following the Trans America Trail, a distance of 6800km.

Starting in Oregon on the west coast and finishing in Virginia on the eastern seaboard, the mostly tarmac route includes 66,000m of climbing through the Colorado Rockies and covers every kind of terrain imaginable.

At his first attempt, Jesse won the gruelling event in an astonishing 18 days, 23 hours and 12 minutes. That's 400km and 20 hours of riding every single day. The 37-year-old finished 450km ahead of the second-placed rider, and was back home in Melbourne before half the field had even finished the race. And he's not done yet.

He like, in his own words, riding bikes. A fantastic understatement, perhaps, from a guy who has

ridden several hundred thousand kilometres in his life, by his own estimation.

"I love nothing more than planning an adventure and heading out exploring on my bike with a few mates," he tells *AG Outdoor* from Curve's Melbourne base. "Endurance riding is a recent thing for me – I've only really taken it up in the last seven years or so."

A BMX world champion in his younger days, and the holder of a PhD in theoretical physics, Jesse progressed through to mountain bike racing, where long-distance events like 24-hour races became a focal point. And, in 2010, he got an idea.

"I saw the documentary film *Ride the Divide* and in it there's a quote from bike-packing pioneer and Tour Divide legend, Matthew Lee; "life is too short not to take on adventures like this," he says. "That really made a lot of sense to me. In the end I had to do the race so I could stop thinking about it."

The Tour Divide is one of the toughest off-road

cycling events on the planet. It covers over 4400km from Canada to Mexico, across the biggest mountains that North America can throw up; the climbing element alone is equivalent to summiting Mt Everest seven times. Jesse finished second at his first go. Bigger events beckoned.

After so many years and miles, traditional training doesn't cut it for Jesse any more. "Unfortunately I'm just an enthusiastic amateur with a day job," he says. "Work takes up a lot of my time – day and night. I found that trying to follow a training plan would only add more stress to my life. I just decided to focus more on just getting out and riding."

Preparing for the event took him more than a year. His priority was keeping weight to a minimum, and his bike and kit was the result of many months of thought and research. A titanium Curve Belgie road frame, Enve carbon forks and Curve's own carbon rims laced to DT hubs formed the heart of the bike, with equipment from Revelate Designs and Sea To Summit forming the basis of his storage system.

Jesse's tactics on the race were pretty simple; go out hard early and see who could manage to hang onto his back wheel. No one did.



Jesse's pace meant only brief stopovers for the obligatory border-crossing pics.



Sweet titanium frame and a top-end build: ideal for crossing the US

Jesse's tactics on the race were pretty simple; go out hard early and see who could manage to hang onto his back wheel. No one did. His aim? Four hundred kilometres, every single day. Food would be sourced along the way – and given the effort he would be putting in, calories came in front of nutrition, with most of his meals taken at small diners scattered along the route. Huge omelettes, hot cakes, massive chocolate milkshakes... it was all fair game to a famished long-distance racer.

"There are definitely some raised eyebrows when you order and when you're furiously motoring through plate after plate of food!" laughs Jesse. Each town and diner stop was also a chance to stash some precious calories away for a rainy day – and he had a few of those. "Three days of riding in incredibly heavy rain was probably the toughest to deal with mentally," he confesses.

Amazingly, Jesse experienced not one single mechanical issue for the entirety of the event, not even a puncture. He changed tyres halfway through as a precaution, but didn't touch his rig again.

"The bottom bracket developed a tiny bit of play, and rough handling from airline staff meant there was a tiny wobble in a rim, but otherwise the bike was absolutely perfect," he says. "And there were some rough roads out there!"

Even more amazingly, Jesse basically wore the same set of clothes for the entire race, saving precious weight and space. Sourced from sponsor Rapha, Jesse reckons that the kit did all right, even after 17 days. "You can clean up pretty quickly in service station bathrooms," he says. "Germs on cycling kit can be killed quickly and easily using a liberal amount of hand sanitiser."

Back home, he's already plotting his next adventure, though he's been careful to give himself some brain space after such a monstrous effort.

JESSE'S TRANS AMERICA BIKE



Frame: Curve Belgie titanium road, large size, disc brake mounts, 1 x extra set of bottle mounts
Fork: Enve carbon road disc
Wheels: Curve 50mm carbon rims, 32h, DT 240 hubs
Tyres: Continental 700 x 25c
Drivetrain: Shimano Dura Ace Di2 (check)
Brakes: Shimano hydraulic disc
Saddle: Tune Speedneedle Alcantara
Handlebars: Haero carbon tri-bars
Extras: (highlights): Revelate Designs mountain feed bags (x2) and gas tank bag, SeaToSummit 4L and 2L dry bags, Pertex Montane jacket, Zpacks breathable Cuben Fiber rain jacket/pants
Weight (laden): 12.7kg

"Mentally, the recovery is tough for me," he admits. "I don't deal with it so well. Others seem to cope better. You have to remember that during these races you're driving yourself onward when everything is screaming 'STOP'. I think it's healthy to let yourself off the hook for a few months afterward and treat yourself like a friend for a change!"

So what's next for this mad adventure? Something that's a little closer to home – but no less challenging. "I want to do the Race to the Rock in September next year," he says. "It'll be Adelaide to Uluru via the Mawson Trail and Oodnadatta Track. We'll cover some of the more remote country than you typically face in bikepacking events."

Somehow we think he'll do okay.



TECH: QUICK TUNE UP TIPS

Our Turner Burner has been getting a flogging over the last couple of months – here are a couple of the upgrades we've done to keep things rolling.

Stem length: The stem of your bike has a big bearing on the way your weight is distributed. Too long and you'll be too stretched out over your top tube, which could have an affect on your steering and your climbing. Too short and your weight will be too centred over your seat and you'll feel very cramped.

Stems are pretty universal, and come in a huge array of lengths and strengths. The Renthal 60mm unit pictured weighs less than 200g but is ultra strong.

Bigger rear brake: Depending on how your brake is mounted to your frame, it's often possible to add a rear disc of a larger diameter. Why would you do that? A bigger disc means more surface area, which means a cooler-running brake that's less prone to fade. We used an NSB billet alloy adaptor to move our Shimano brake enough to fit a Shimano 180mm rotor to the rear of our Turner, and it worked like a charm. There's less effort required for more braking, and it feels stronger over a longer period of usage.

Single front chainring: The jury is still out on this modification. We've replaced a pair of chainrings with a single 30-tooth item up front, in combination with an 11-42t 10-speed rear cassette. The single front ring modification is popular currently, largely due to the availability of what are known as narrow/wide rings, which are designed not to allow the chain to fall off. After a couple of rides, we haven't lost a chain, but we have lost a bit of climbing ability. Maybe we need to ride more.



Bikes of 2016

Even though we're only halfway through 2015, the minds of bicycle shop owners everywhere is already firmly into next year, as the trade show season hots up.

The trend for Aussie retailers will be – fortunately for us multi-sport types – the gravel/adventure bike, like the ones we featured last issue. Alloy frames, carbon forks, disc brakes and even 1 x 11 drivetrains will be commonplace from brands like Cannondale, Kona and Specialized, while local companies Apollo and Malvern Star have a few tricks up their collective sleeves.

Watch out, too, for a handful of pseudo fat bikes – known as 27.5+ – to start creeping onto shop floors.

1. CANNONDALE SLATE

Slated (get it?) to launch later this year in three alloy-framed versions, Cannondale's Slate drop-bar gravel bike uses two novel features to separate it from the pack.

Firstly, it uses 650b diameter wheels and large-volume tyres to match the rolling diameter of a typical 700c wheel and tyre; same speed, more cushion, basically.

Secondly, it uses a new version of Cannondale's venerable Lefty suspension fork, known as the Oliver. It'll have 30mm of travel but, unlike a mountain bike fork, it won't sag into its travel when the rider hops on board.

2. KONA PRIVATE JAKE

Canadian company Kona has been rocking a cyclocross range for more than a decade now, but the Private Jake is a new offering. It's unusual in the fact that it is built around a single front chainring; there is no way to install a front

derailleur to extend its gear range.

Why? Kona wanted to shorten the rear-end of the bike as much as possible to sharpen the handling, and eliminating the derailleur helps. As well, Kona has fitted the Private with sliding rear dropouts, so you could eschew gears all together and run it as a single-speed bike.

Built around an alloy frame and carbon fork, the Private Jake also runs disc brakes and mountain bike-style through-axles front and rear.

3. SPECIALIZED FUSE

This hardtail mountain bike will come to Australia in three grades, and will be one of the first commercially available 27.5+ bikes on the market. What's 27.5+? It's a wider version of the 27.5-inch wheel that's taken over the mountain bike market, but it's not as wide as a fat bike's monstrous rubber.

Similar to the idea behind the wheels on the Slate, the 27.5+ wheel has the same rolling diameter as a 29-inch wheel and tyre combo, but it's lighter, the tyres can be run at a lower pressure and are wider to boot.

Other features include a dropper seatpost and a long-travel fork that's matched to the bike's frame size (small frames get a 100mm fork, while larger ones get a 120mm travel version).





LONG TERMER // NINER ROS 9

RRP \$1570 (frame only) www.rowneysports.com,
www.summitcycles.bike

Tested by Justin Walker

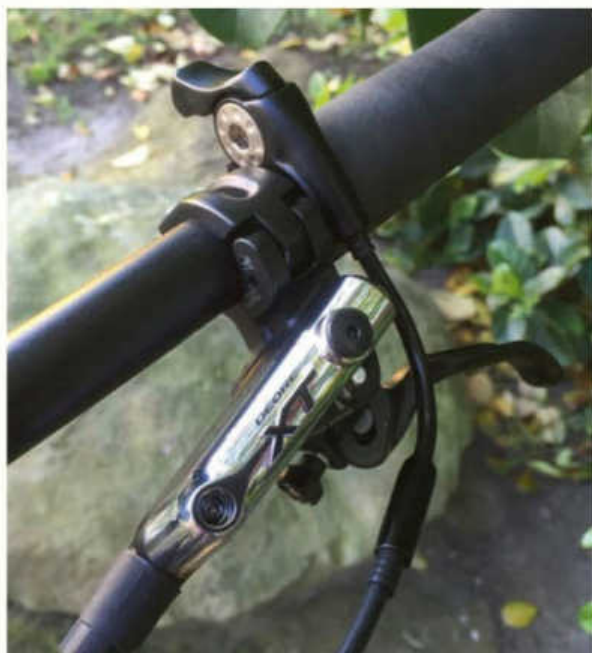
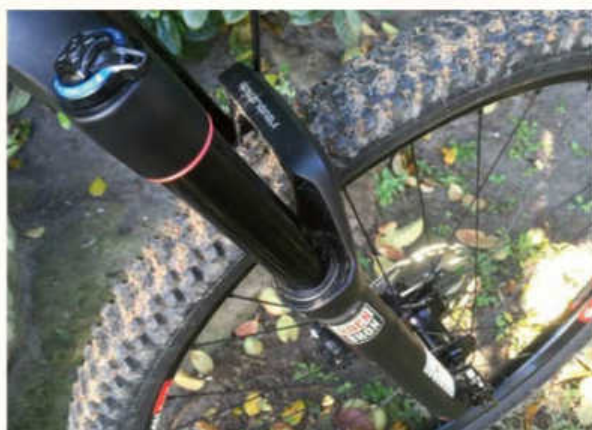
It has only taken a couple of months to build up our long-term Niner ROS 9. The burly Forge Grey machine arrived at AG Outdoor HQ as a frame only, just in time for its introduction in the pages of our last issue. And, after plenty of build advice from Rowney Sport's Paul Rowney and Adam Macbeth and Joe Dodd from Summit Cycles, the final result is impressive.

The first thing we ticked off the build list was the front fork; Paul Rowney mentioned he'd had plenty of success fitting the Rockshox Revelation RCT3 (set at 130mm) to the ROS 9 and it sounded perfect to me; the resulting 67.5-degree head angle gives just the right amount of confidence for up- and down-trail razzing. The Revelation's adjustability is brilliant, with the three settings – Open, Threshold and Lockout – easily toggled through via the top-mounted lever. Most of my riding so far has been with the fork in Open, except for when I have been tackling some bitumen or very smooth surface climbs.

Threshold does temper the bigger hits somewhat but I like plenty of give in my fork when riding. The fork's further adjustments include low-speed compression and external rebound controls. It's a pretty sweet – and light – fork that has impressed so far.

With a hardtail, there's obviously no forgiveness from the rear-end, although the ROS 9's steel frame does mute the trail chatter more than my old alloy hardtail ever did. To give myself a bit more cushion – and grab some extra trail traction at the same time – I have followed the latest wide-rim/tyre trend and had Joe from Summit build up a set of Stan's No Tubes Flow EX rims, with tough DT Swiss Competition double-butt spokes, and some rugged (and sweet-sounding) Hope hubs. Joe's built up tons of wheelsets over the years and was able to whip up the wheels in little time at all. The only thing I need to do now is fit larger rubber to take advantage of the wide inner rim of the Flows to ensure a nice big footprint to aid traction. In the meantime, the WTB Wolverine 2.2 rubber is doing a decent job.

The ROS 9's 1x10 drivetrain is a mix of well-proved and new tech. A Shimano XT rear derailleur pushes the chain across a fancy new Praxis 11-40 wide-range cassette. This wide-range cassette expands the gearing of a 1x10 setup – until recently the widest you could go with a 10-speed cassette was 11-36, and it is amazing what a difference those four extra cogs make when you're pumping up a steep climb. I am a huge fan of this



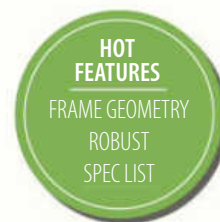
cassette from Praxis – it’s much cheaper than upgrading to 1x11 and offers – for this rider, anyway – more than enough range for where I ride.

Keeping it all under control are Shimano’s ultra reliable XT brakes, with a 180mm rotor up front and a 160mm at the rear. I have had this brake set-up on all my bikes and never had a single issue; the modulation is perfect and the stopping power is impressive. The last piece of kit added to the bike was a pretty obvious choice, especially considering the ROS 9’s design remit of trail/all-mountain riding: a KS Lev dropper post was the final piece of this steel monster puzzle. I dunno how we ever rode MTBs without these; the ability to drop the seat out of the way for a rocky or steep descent, or even for jumps and tight winding trail sections where you have to “push” the bike around a bit, makes a dropper post a must-fit.

So how does this thing ride? Well, like you stole it. Okay, that’s a cliché, but I reckon Adam from

Summit Cycles put forward an apt description of the ROS 9 as being “just like a big BMX”; I don’t think I have ever ridden a bike that encourages you to get so rowdy and loose on the trails. The big wheels and trail-oriented geometry allow for some rider errors-of-judgment (and yep, there’ve been a few), and that short chainstay makes it feel like the rear wheel is right under you; the rear-end is highly flick-able and is probably the one thing I have yet to really push to the limit so far. You never quite forget you’re on a hardtail, even though the steel frame does mute the vibrations somewhat, but that just means you have to pick your lines with a bit more care. Not a big problem, really.

And that’s the equally exciting and scary thing with this wrecking ball of a bike: riding the ROS 9 makes you feel like you’re nearly invincible, and up for smashing any trail – all the while having a cracking good time doing it. The other long-term rig in our stable, a so-sweet Santa Cruz 5010, is starting to feel neglected...



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Road Trippin'

Welcome to *AG Outdoor's* Road Trippin' section. Vehicle-based family touring and adventuring in Australia and New Zealand is easy and loads of fun, whether you drive a sedan, station wagon, compact SUV or 4WD.



There are a number of walks around Mallacoota that showcase the Wilderness Coast.



The East Gippsland Rail Trail is a fantastic bike-base adventure for the family.

ROAD TRIP // EAST GIPPSLAND, VIC

Seven day high

From the High Country and its alpine terrain and myriad trails, to the majestic Snowy River, coastal hinterland and wild, remote beaches, Victoria's East Gippsland makes for the ideal adventure road trip.

WORDS **JUSTIN WALKER** PHOTOS **TOURISM VICTORIA**

It sits snug on this continent's south-east corner, a seemingly unobtrusive part of Victoria, but East Gippsland is probably one of Australia's premier adventure road trip destinations. It is easy to access from Melbourne – or Sydney – and offers the chance for adventurous families to explore any number of unique regions (and the adventures contained within) over the course of a week.

East Gippsland is also the perfect excuse to pack *all* that outdoor gear you have in your shed, simply due to the wide range of activities on offer: pack your bikes for the famous East Gippsland Rail Trail; your canoe (or kayak) for that paddle on the Snowy River (or jump on a guided rafting trip); fishing rods for the sublime fresh- and saltwater angling on offer; your camping gear; and your

hiking boots for the many walking trails in the Alpine, Snowy River and Croajingalong national parks. Whether you're a couple or a young family, there is plenty of outdoor fun to keep you busy over the course of a week or more. For us at *AG Outdoor*, a week-long loop, starting and finishing at the beautiful coastal resort town of Lakes Entrance, is enough to sample a taste of what this region has to offer, as well as showing us what else we could tackle on a return trip.

HIGH ON LIFE

It is one of this country's – indeed, the world's – famous rivers. Even though now dammed as part of the amazing engineering feat that is the Snowy Hydro Scheme, the Snowy River still offers adventurers plenty of excitement, whether it is

aboard a raft in its upper sections or in a kayak or canoe on its lower, more tame, sections. The national park of the same name also offers plenty of vehicle-borne, hiking and wildlife experiences. And, best of all, it is easily accessed from Lakes Entrance, driving north.

Firstly, before you reach the park boundary, you will pass through the small township of Buchan. Do yourself a favour and check out the Buchan Caves. After that little adventure, continue north along the Gelantipy Road until you reach Seldom Seen, before turning right onto the dirt (and steep in parts) McKillops Road, which will take you via the spectacular Little River Gorge Lookout (make sure you stop here) to the famous McKillops Bridge that spans the Snowy River. The campsite on the northern side of the bridge is a great overnight stop, and it also means you will have easy/direct access to the Snowy River for your canoe put-in the following morning. You could, of course, then paddle for a few days all the way down the river to its flow-out at Marlo, into Bass Strait. That adventure, however, might have to wait for another day. But, even spending just a few hours paddling the river in the McKillops Bridge region is a great way to experience the Snowy and while away a day before continuing your drive.

From McKillops Bridge campground you have two options: if you have a 4WD, and are relatively experienced, the Deddick Trail beckons. This



Caption (clockwise from left) Walkers enjoying the pristine coastline of Croajingalong National Park; kayakers exploring Mallacoota Inlet; Lighthouses, beaches and big blue sky all await adventurous visitors to East Gippsland.



trail takes you up high on to the ridges of this steep country but beware it is just that: steep! For those slightly less adventurous, the preferred option is to drive a little way along the Deddick Trail until you reach the cool Silver Mine Walking Track which is definitely worth a look, then doubling back and rejoining McKillops Bridge Road and looping back south along it until you reach the small settlement of Bonang. From here you are very close to the northern borders of Errinundra National Park. We'd opt to overnight at the Delegate River campground, just east of Bonang, via the Bonang Road, and then Bendoc-Orbost Road. The Delegate River is quiet and beautiful and, if you're into fly fishing, you might get a chance for trout here. Also keep an eye out for the reclusive platypus that are prevalent along this river.

The next morning you can backtrack south along Bendoc-Orbost Road and then loop left onto Errinundra Road to arrive at the Errinundra Saddle Rainforest Walk. On this short, 40-minute walk, you'll be surrounded by cool-temperature rainforest that includes black olive berry and southern sassafras, as well as some massive mountain plum pines. You will also see plenty of shining gum and other alpine eucalypt variants.

COASTAL DREAMING

The rest of this day can be devoted to road tripping in the literal sense; you will be following a number of national park and forestry roads east until you hit the Monaro Highway. Joining this main road, you barrel south to the small town of

Cann River for refuelling and resupply, before turning east on the Princes Highway and making for the pretty holiday resort town of Mallacoota, nestled on the inlet of the same name, which feeds into the wild Southern Ocean.

There is an abundance of adventure at Mallacoota: you can spend a day in a canoe or kayak exploring the huge Mallacoota Inlet, jump aboard a chartered fishing boat and try your luck off the coast, explore some of the town's many short walks, or tackle part of the famous Wilderness Coast Walk (WCW) over the length of a day, heading either south to Shipwreck Creek or north to Cape Howe with views to Gabo Island. Or you can walk the Mallacoota Coastal Walk, which covers some of the WCW south of Mallacoota. It is well worth spending a couple of days in Mallacoota to explore and, even then, you still won't have really done it justice.

FOLLOW THAT TRAIL

It will be hard to leave Mallacoota but more adventure awaits you as you start the return journey to Lakes Entrance. You can drive the entire way, but we reckon there's one very good reason why you should stop at Orbost and ditch your vehicle: the East Gippsland Rail Trail (EGRT).

This fantastic bicycle ride makes for a great adventure on its own. However, with a bit of pre-planning (i.e. a vehicle shuttle; local operators can assist with this) we'd definitely recommend this as a must-do. The trail itself is 96km in length and runs between Orbost and Bairnsdale, taking

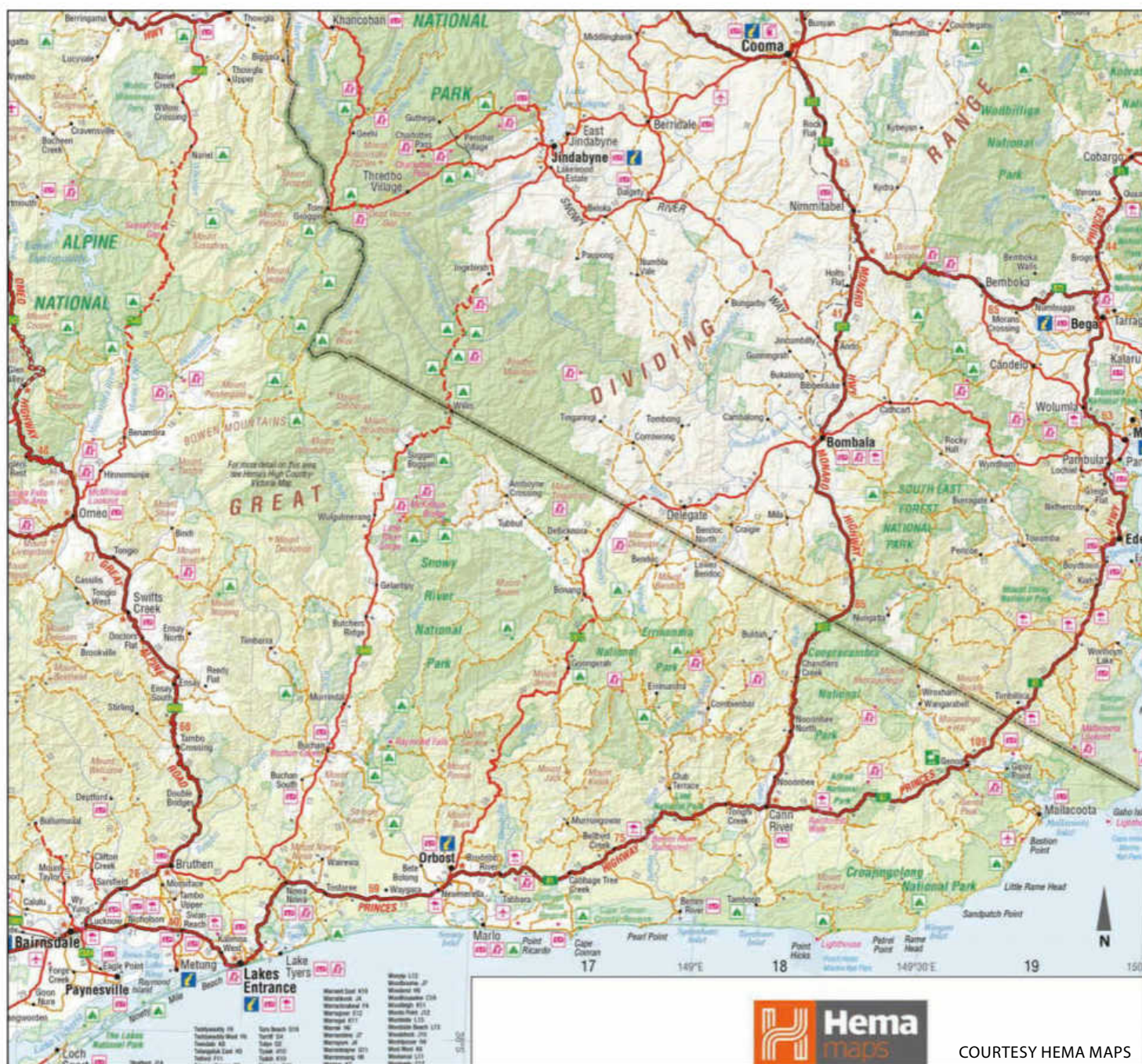
THE ESSENTIALS

Getting there: Lakes Entrance is 319km east of Melbourne, via the Princes Highway. The northern point of Mallacoota is a further 202km. Mallacoota is 560km south of Sydney, via the Princes Highway (you can also go via Canberra/Monaro Highway, which is longer but slightly quicker). The road-trip route as described here is suitable for all-wheel-drive and 4WD vehicles. If you skip the Snowy River NP section, you will only need a 2WD vehicle.

Best time to go: Spring, summer and autumn are the best seasons to visit East Gippsland, with the region's mild climate offering warm days and pleasant nights. The summer holidays and Easter period are very busy, but there's plenty of space here for everyone. Winter can be a great time to visit as well, but just be aware that most alpine 4WD routes in the national parks are closed during this season.

Accommodation: You will find everything from bush campsites in national parks through to luxury digs in the resort towns dotted through the region.

More information: For those keen on finding out more on the region, including suggested itineraries, local operators (for such things as the East Gippsland Rail Trail, fishing charters, national parks and guided hikes) and all the types of accommodation available, see www.discovereastgippsland.com.au.



It is well worth spending a couple of days in Mallacoota to explore and, even then, you still won't have really done it justice.

riders through a variety of landscapes and up and over some small hills, but we'd put a twist in the trail (so to speak). Using Nowa Nowa as the overnight halfway point (there are plenty of accommodation options here, ranging from campsites to hotel/motel), we'd then continue along the EGRT until we reached the turn-off to the Gippsland Lakes Discovery Trail, a shorter (25km) rail trail that cuts directly south, down to Lakes Entrance.

After that couple of days' pedalling, some options for your last day and night in East

Gippsland would be to sample some of the Lakes Entrance fishing fleet's fresh catch (or try to catch your own), head out on a guided boat tour of the lakes themselves, and then, to finish off on an adventurous high, camp at the boat-access-only Bunga Arm campground.

Like we said, a week in East Gippsland is barely enough to experience what this region can offer outdoor-oriented visitors but, at least by spending seven days here you will have spotted plenty of other options for your next jaunt to this amazing part of the Garden State.



ADVENTURE VEHICLE TEST

Subaru Forester 2.0D-S

Price: \$41,490

More info: www.subaru.com.au

The latest generation Subaru Forester has been a massive success for the Japanese company with a model option for just about any buyer and budget. The only thing missing from the Forester range – until quite recently – was a diesel model with an automatic gearbox. The manual-only diesel variant has been a decent seller for Subaru, but now with the launch of a Forester diesel backed by a Lineatronic CVT auto transmission, sales will undoubtedly increase.

For vehicle-borne adventures, the diesel Forester is a brilliant option; the incredibly frugal engine (6.4L/100km combined cycle fuel consumption) boasts 108kW of power and, more importantly when talking diesel engines, 350Nm of maximum torque that comes in at 1600rpm – nice and low in the rev range. With such an abundance of torque at low revs, the CVT-backed diesel provides easy cruising and an impressive touring range, which is a big factor in choosing a vehicle to head off the beaten track to reach that campsite, trailhead or rock-climbing crag. The CVT also means the diesel Forester now gets Subaru's cool X-Mode, which enhances the vehicle's

off-road capabilities by adjusting gearing, traction control and Hill Descent Control to aid traction in difficult terrain.

AG Outdoor recently tested the high-end 2.0D-S variant of the new CVT diesel Forester and found it offered everything you could think of for the asking price. This Forester – like all Subarus – has a five-star safety rating and is driven via the company's highly respected (and effective) symmetrical all-wheel drive system. It offers plenty of cargo space in the back (along with a full-size spare tyre); exceptional handling; good fore/aft vision for the driver; a well-appointed leather-trim interior (think: power/heated driver and front passenger seats and powered folding rear seats) that has enough space/legroom for four adults easily; a powered boot; rear-view camera; and a comprehensive infotainment system that includes Bluetooth, large LCD display, navigation, audio (radio/CD/USB/Bluetooth) and even dialogue phrase-based voice recognition, so you can simply say out loud the name and address of your destination and the satnav will display your driving route.

The Forester 2.0D-S is a very, very easy vehicle to drive. There is minimal turbo-lag/hesitation when you put your foot on the throttle and the power

and torque delivery is linear and seamless, with the Forester quick to reach highway cruising speeds. And forget about old noisy diesel engines – this oiler is super-quiet and the sound deadening used in the Forester is top-notch; engine noise is muted to a barely discernable hum.

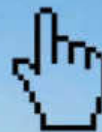
Handling is as you would expect from a Subaru: the well-weighted steering wheel and direct steering, combined with effective dampers, mean the Forester is both fun and lively when the road becomes more windy or the surface deteriorates. The ride is firm without being uncomfortable and body roll is well controlled.

For couples or families that enjoy adventure road trips, the Forester 2.0D-S is a vehicle that is well worth consideration; its medium size means it is easy to manoeuvre around town, fuel economy is outstanding and perfect for those bigger trips, the deceptively spacious interior will swallow all your gear, and it is one of the best handling midsize SUVs on the market, with well-proved, effective driving aids to keep you on track.

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SKILLS | TRAD CLIMBING

SCHOOL OF ROCK

While sport climbing allows you to tackle some pretty extreme terrain, trad climbing teaches you all the skills you need to climb just about anywhere. But first, you need to go to school.

WORDS AND PHOTOS
KEN EASTWOOD

Eric Butler lead-climbs the Blue Mountains five-star classic route The Eternity, grade 18.



Bottom: Guide Eric Butler now works in the Warrambungles, near Tamworth, NSW

Top: The view from the cliff top at Mount Piddington, near Mount Victoria in the Blue Mountains.

My nuts keep falling out. Yes, I know, it's a highly embarrassing problem for a bloke my age, and not the sort of thing you can discuss in all circles. But the nuts I'm referring to are the little wedge-shaped bits of metal that traditional climbers jam into rock cracks and crevices as they are climbing. They then clip the rope attached to their harness to these little nuts and, should the climber fall, they hope madly that the nuts will stay in place to prevent them from becoming a hard-to-clean-up mess at the bottom of a cliff.

I've used this method virtually since I started climbing, albeit with other people's equipment, and only recently bought my own 'trad rack' — a stack of gear called 'protection' with an assortment of nuts (or 'wires') and spring-loaded camming devices.

The first few times I used my own gear, I put nuts into what I thought were really good spots then, to my horror, once I'd climbed 5m or so past them, they would pop off the rock and slide uselessly down the rope. It's an extremely disconcerting sight when you are dangling by your fingertips.

So here I am, at Blue Mountains Climbing School in Katoomba (part of the Blue Mountains Adventure Company), signed up for a whole day of one-on-one instruction with a climbing doctor to ensure my nuts stay where they're meant to.

WHY BOTHER?

In recent decades, traditional rock-climbing has been completely overtaken in popularity by sport climbing. In sport climbing areas, someone has already gone to the cliff and installed a series of metal bolts or rings all the way up the cliff. The climber then doesn't need to think about where to put their 'protection' — they just clip their rope into every little bolt or steel ring that they come across. ➤

As long as the bolts were installed correctly, this is generally a safer way of climbing, and more suited to climbers who have migrated to the real world from a climbing gym. It involves a lot less thinking, for a start. As long-term climbing instructor Chris Peisker, of the Climbing Company, in Natimuk, Victoria, says: “In traditional climbing, about 50 per cent of your mental attention is focused on putting your gear in, and about 50 per cent on the climbing itself, whereas in sport climbing, 100 per cent is on the climbing.”

The concentration required for traditional climbing, the sometimes fiddly nature of putting in natural protection, and the extra weight of all that equipment tugging on your harness, usually means that people climb at a considerably lower grade when trad climbing, as opposed to sports climbing. In my case, I drop about four grades on the Australian Ewbank system when I climb traditionally. So you can lose a little of the rush of pulling off hard moves.

SO WHY BOTHER?

If climbing outdoors is a form of communion with the rock — a blending of the inanimate with the human form — then the experience becomes even more intimate as you climb traditionally, having to think about all its cracks and crevices, studying and feeling all its form and features. In many places, climbing traditionally allows you to get away from the well-travelled pre-bolted routes and into more interesting, adventurous routes. And there are plenty of fantastic, popular routes that require at least some level of traditional protection. If you can climb traditionally it opens up a whole new world: from the climbing Mecca of Mt Arapiles in Victoria (where every Aussie climber should go once in their life), to hundreds of long, multi-pitch routes in the Blue Mountains, Frog Buttress in Queensland, dolerite climbs in Tasmania and elsewhere.

According to Chris, people should ideally start trad climbing as soon as they can. “There’s no issue in going from trad to sport climbing, but the other way around is like going from driving an automatic to a manual; there’s a lot more skill involved,” he says.

“For people who start climbing with trad, their experience advances along with their climbing ability. But those who go from sport climbing to trad climbing really have to take a big step backwards, and they might not feel like they’re pushing themselves that much.”

For example, sport climbers who are used to climbing overhangs are unlikely to be able to climb at that level when they are learning to place rock-solid pieces of gear into the rock to protect themselves. They’re more likely — particularly initially — to be doing gentler climbs with plenty of ledges or rest places to carefully place gear.

CLIMBING 101

The Blue Mountains Climbing School has plenty of good instructors, and I chose to spend the day with Eric Butler. I’d previously climbed some big routes both in the Blue Mountains and in Warrumbungle National Park with him. He is an extraordinary young man — a quiet, self-assured



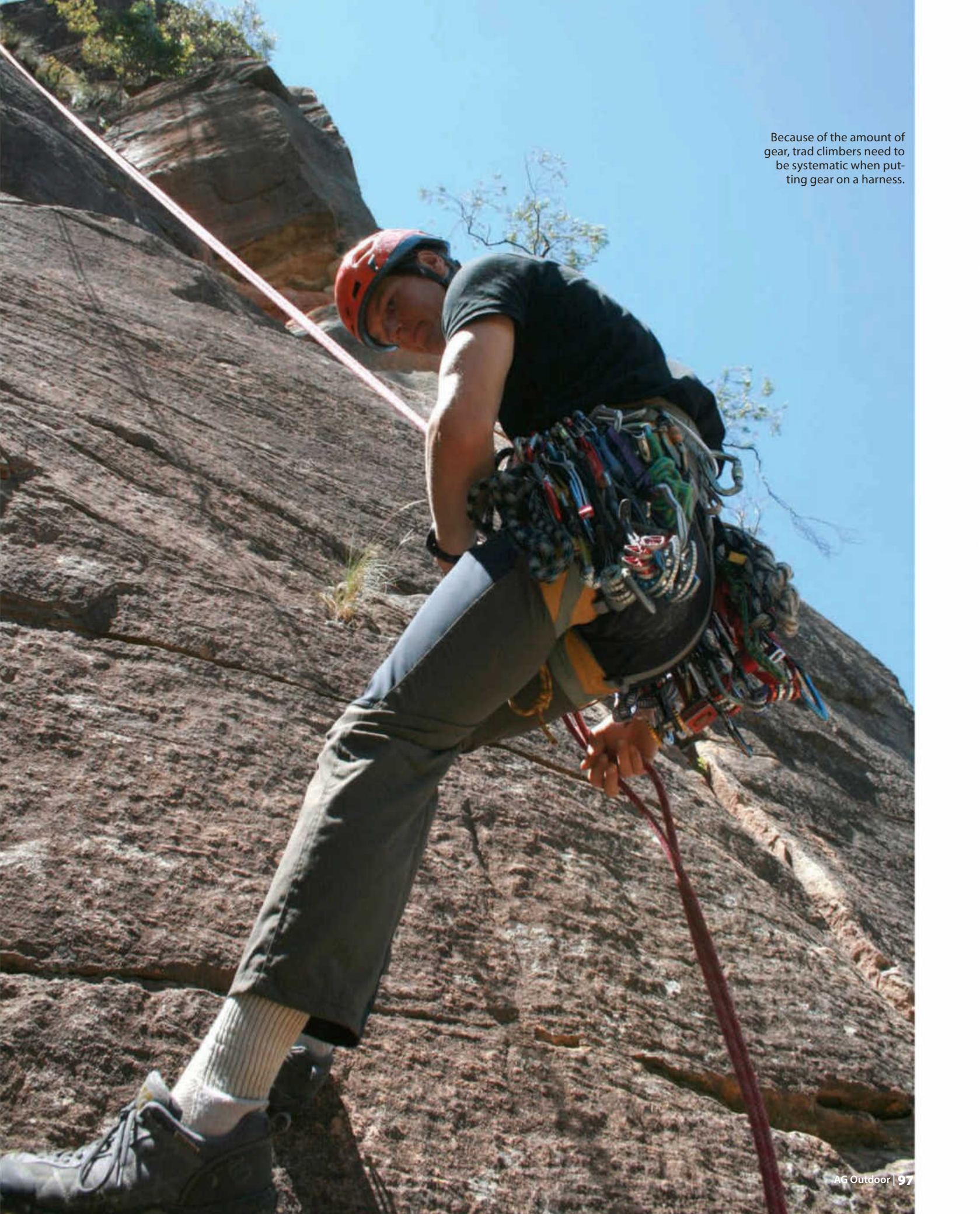
A belay system safely set up off the belayer's harness.

“There’s no issue in going from trad to sport climbing, but the other way around is like going from driving an automatic to a manual; there’s a lot more skill involved,” he says.

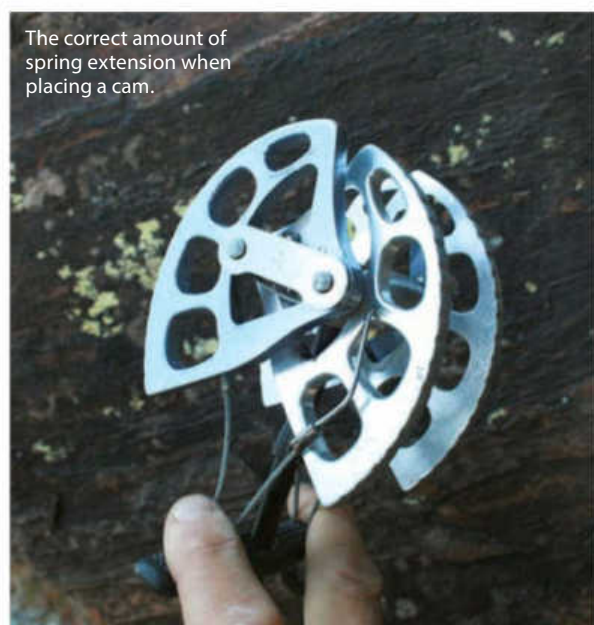
adventuring 24-year-old who tells no one about his adventures, but just goes out and achieves them. Whether walking solo through the thickest wilds of Wollemi National Park, or scaling some huge cliff with dodgy rock that few others would brave, he does everything with a quiet, unassuming confidence and unflappability that just engenders respect.

We spend our day at Mt Piddington, which is known as the best spot in the Blue Mountains to learn trad climbing techniques. There are more than 200 routes here, and the vast majority are under grade 20, with more than 50 graded 15 or less (and therefore considered ‘easy’ — the open-ended Ewbank system currently goes up to ridiculously hard climbs in the low 30s).

We start on the 24m climb ‘Joseph’ (grade 14). It’s a cracker, rated with four stars, and Eric encouraged me to place as much protection as possible, so I put in a piece ➤



Because of the amount of gear, trad climbers need to be systematic when putting gear on a harness.



The correct amount of spring extension when placing a cam.



Cams can walk backwards, so be careful if the crack flares at the back.

every metre or so.

Climbing protection is divided into passive protection and active protection. Active protection is generally spring-loaded and so squeezes itself into place. Passive protection includes the wedge-shaped nuts and other larger pieces called hexes that have to be placed extra carefully to hold a fall. As he followed me up the climb, he then rated every piece of gear on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being “couldn’t hold the nut tool” to “absolute, perfect bomber”. None of my pieces popped out, but I really didn’t do too well, with a lot of my pieces rated around the 5 mark. And a 50 per cent chance of breaking a fall really isn’t great odds.

TIPS AND TRICKS

We spend the next few hours on the ground, placing piece after piece into slots and holes, with Eric showing me some of the things to look for.

“There are three things you’ve got to consider when placing gear,” he says. “Firstly, the integrity of the rock – is the rock actually good enough to hold the piece?” He points out a couple of boulders that could become detached if someone jammed a piece of gear into the cracks around them. “Secondly, what is the shape of the crack you are putting the gear in? If it is a parallel crack, use cams. If it is a V-shape, it’s more suitable for wires or hexes.

“Thirdly, how much surface area of the piece is in contact with the rock?” Eric shows me how the pieces of passive protection are shaped peculiarly so that by turning them different ways you can maximise their contact with the rock. “If it’s the right size, but you’re not getting much contact between it and the rock, just try turning it,” he says.

He then describes what happens at a micro level when a climber does fall onto a piece of gear. In Blue Mountains sandstone, the piece slides a little as the sandstone crumbles a fraction. A bigger piece of gear dissipates the falling climber’s energy over a larger area of rock than a

smaller piece – so if there is a choice in a particular crack, always use a bigger piece, he says.

Eric encourages me to “seat” my nuts better – again it, ahem, sounds a little delicate, but basically to give them a really good tug. “Really weld it in there,” he says, giving the carabiner attached to the nut three hard pulls. “Of course, it may depend who is seconding the climb – if they are a beginner [who may struggle to get out a piece of gear that is solidly wedged in place], you may have to recognise that you’ll occasionally have to leave a piece there. But it’s better to be safe.”

We then look at the strengths and weaknesses of cams. They lose a lot of their strength if they are “overcammed” or “undercammed”, and I had a tendency to undercam them – putting them in a position where most of the spring was already extended. I generally needed to choose a larger size, or squeeze them into smaller spaces to make them more effective. “If you have no choice but to either overcam or undercam them, then overcame,” Eric advises. He shows me how to tell the ideal range.

Because they actively grip the rock, cams are much better at holding multi-directional pulls than nuts, Eric says, “So in most cases make your very first piece that you put in a cam rather than a wire”. The cam can usually handle the movement and the angle of rope between the belayer and the climber without being pulled out. Similarly, whenever the climb changes direction, put in a cam rather than a wire.

He also suggests that when the climb changes direction I use a longer sling (60cm) between the piece of protection and the rope. This means that the rope above is less likely to pull out the piece of gear because of the angle. If the climb is not very straight up and down, but wanders all over the place, nearly every piece will need a longer sling. This will also help minimise rope drag.

Surprisingly, Eric then shows me how cams can walk backwards into the crack when they are moved from side



An equalised belay station, finished with an overhand knot.



to side. This is not always a problem, because it can sometimes make them more secure, but if the crack in which you've placed them flares towards the back, it can be a serious problem.

Next Eric shows me how to establish and quickly equalise a bomb-proof belay, using a 7-8m piece of cordelette or thin rope. With a small figure-8 knot in each end of the cordelette, you clip the two ends into one of your points of protection. Then clip the other end of what is now a loop into one of the other pieces of protection, and then a single part of the loop into the remaining one or two pieces. You should then have a series of loops hanging down. Even up these loops, and then tie an overhand knot in the whole lot. This means that should any one piece fail, the rest of the system remains intact.

After all this, it's time to go climbing again. Thankfully I've been paying attention, and Eric follows me up with a smile. "That was a nine," he says of one little nut near the top. "And that hex lower down was absolutely perfect – bomber!"

Ahh, finally I can rest knowing that my nuts are now far more likely to stay where we all want them.

WHERE CAN I LEARN?

It is recommended that you learn trad climbing from an experienced climber or through paid instruction. The best places for instruction are in the key climbing areas of the Blue Mountains, NSW, and Mt Arapiles and the Grampians, Vic.

NSW: Blue Mountains Climbing School, www.bluemountainsclimbingschool.com.au

Blue Mountains Adventure Company, www.bmac.com.au

VIC: The Climbing Company, www.climbco.com.au

TAS: Rock Climbing Adventures Tasmania, www.rcat.com.au

Further reading: *Mountaineering: the freedom of the hills*,

Edited by Ronald C. Eng.

BASIC TRAD RACK

Having come down tremendously in price over the past decade, a basic trad rack will cost considerably less than \$1000, and if you have already been sport climbing, you will have some gear. Over time it is helpful to have doubles of most things, and to add to the size range, depending on the area you are climbing in. For example, climbs at Mt Arapiles often require smaller nuts, and some adventure climbs in the Blue Mountains suggest "a lot of big gear", such as a number 4 cam. Cams are the most expensive item, ranging in price from about \$60 to \$160 each.

- 12 quick draws
- Cams: Recommended sizes 0.5, 0.75, 1, 2, 3
- Nuts: Recommended sizes 4–13
- Nut tool, to help remove stuck pieces
- Hexes: a few
- An assortment of locking carabiners, plus individual clipping carabiners, loops (both 60cm and 1.2m), belay devices and cordelette



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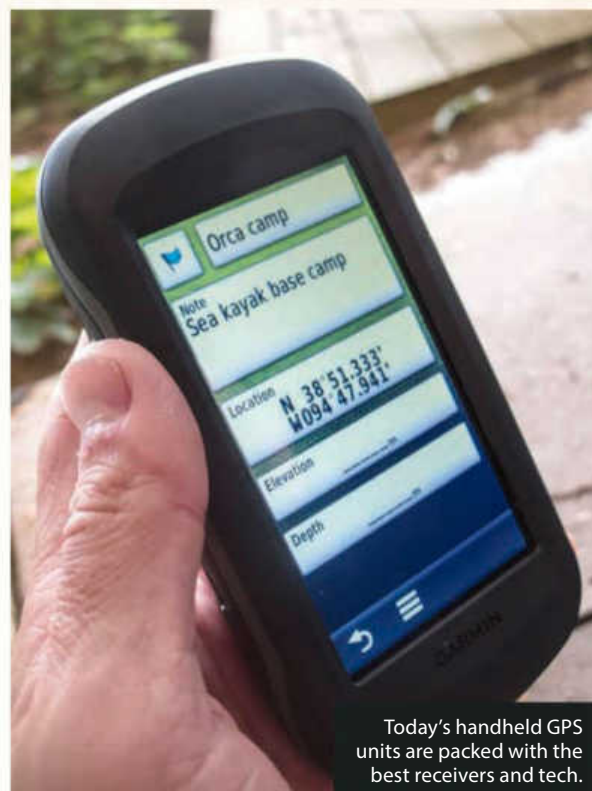
In-vehicle GPS units, such as this Hema Maps unit, are a brilliant addition to your outback adventure kit.



WHERE ON EARTH?

Civilian GPS receivers have come a long way since they made their debut in the early 1990s, and they make navigating easier than ever.

WORDS **DEAN MELLOR** PHOTOS **JUSTIN WALKER**




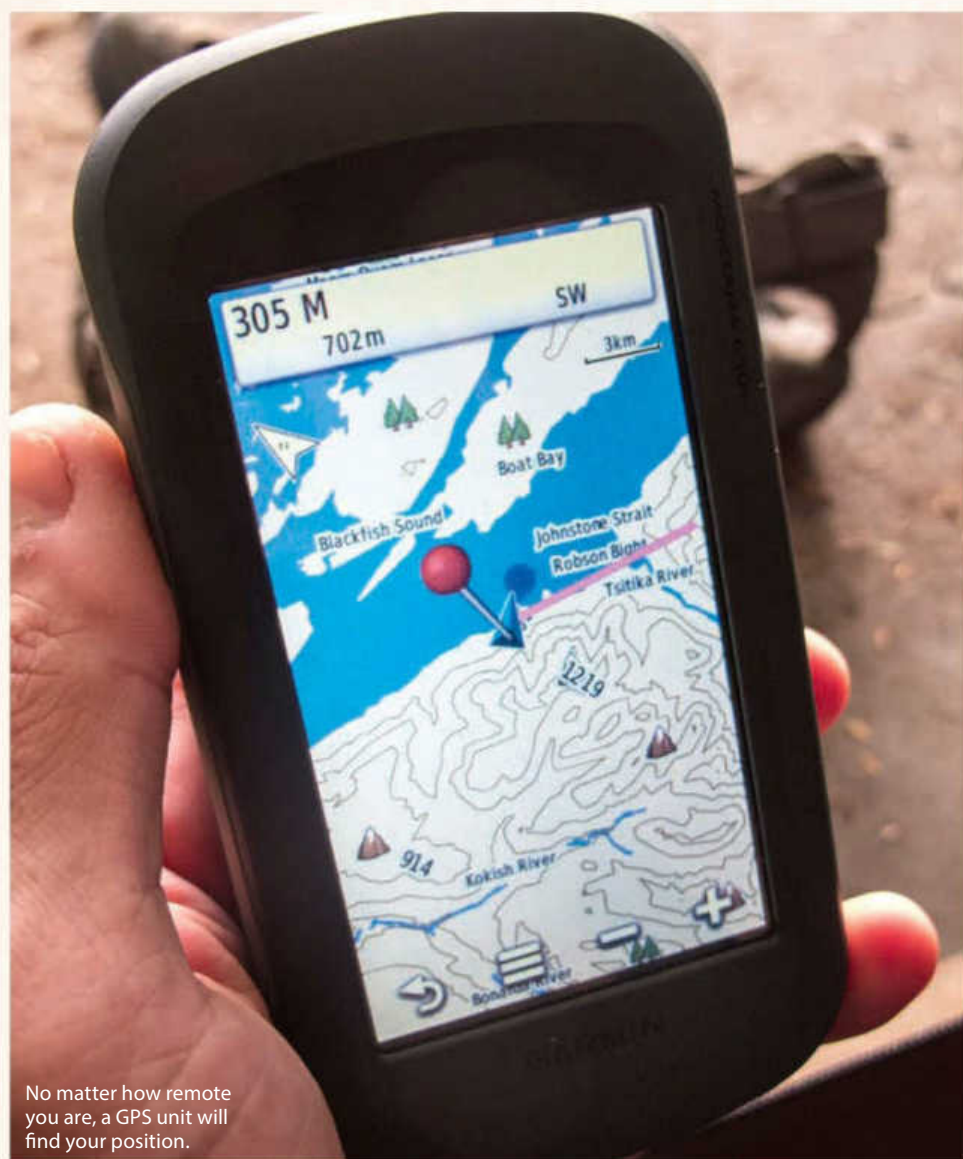
Today's handheld GPS units are packed with the best receivers and tech.

Despite its involvement in wars, humanitarian efforts and geopolitical power struggles, it could be argued that one of the biggest impacts the US Department of Defense has had on the world in which we live today is the development and implementation of the Global Positioning System (GPS). After all, people the world over rely on GPS every day for all manner of tasks, from finding someone's address on a satnav or phone to piloting a passenger plane or container ship across the globe.

Obviously GPS has also had a huge impact on the way adventurers navigate the great outdoors. We need no longer rely on paper maps, compasses and rulers to find our way around in even the most remote and isolated parts of the planet; now we just need a capable GPS receiver loaded with the right mapping software and an ability to keep its batteries charged. ... although paper maps are always a great back-up in case of a technological mishap.

GPS HISTORY

In the 1970s the US Department of Defense kicked off its GPS program, which was originally intended to be exclusively for military use. When finished in 1995, it consisted of 24 satellites orbiting at an altitude of 20,200km giving coverage of the entire globe, along with a few spares in case any of the satellites ever malfunctioned. Today, there are more than 30 satellites in the GPS network that are technologically superior to the originals. 



No matter how remote you are, a GPS unit will find your position.

When the USSR shot down a civilian passenger plane (KAL-007) in 1983 after it strayed into foreign airspace, then President Ronald Reagan announced that the GPS network would also be available for civilian use, albeit without the accuracy available to the US military; civilian GPS signals were intentionally degraded through Selective Availability (SA) for national security reasons. The result was that consumer GPS receivers could give a reasonable position fix, but they could be out by up to 250m; not ideal if you're trying to navigate while flying a plane, or trying to choose between two seemingly parallel tracks when navigating in the bush.

In May 2000, then President Bill Clinton announced that SA would be switched off for good, giving civilian users of the GPS network accuracy down to just a couple of metres and, in doing so, revolutionising the way we use GPS in

devices like satnavs and smartphones.

Not wanting to depend on the US GPS satellite network, the Russians developed their own satellite navigation system called GLONASS (Global Navigation Satellite System), which consists of 24 satellites. Although similar in concept to GPS, GLONASS satellites have a slightly different orbit to GPS satellites and emit slightly different signals, although there are now a number of consumer GPS devices that make use of both GPS and GLONASS signals.

On the consumer front, early GPS receivers were very basic by today's standards. By the mid-1990s there were a number of manufacturers including Sony, Panasonic, Eagle, Silva, Magellan and Garmin, but some of these companies have either dropped out of the GPS receiver scene completely or consolidated with other manufacturers.

With more basic antennas, early consumer GPS

If you plan on using a GPS device to navigate on a remote-area trip, or in harsh terrain, then you'll need a dedicated device rather than just a smartphone.

receivers took longer to acquire satellite signals and were less able to do so in forested terrain than today's high-tech units. And unlike today, there was no mapping software, so your position was displayed on a grey LCD screen in latitude, longitude and altitude coordinates which you would then have to plot on a paper map (and SA sometimes made that a hit and miss affair). Other functions included heading, track, speed and time, as well as the ability to mark waypoints and create routes. The other drawback with GPS receivers in the mid-1990s was their insatiable appetite for alkaline batteries; you'd have to carry a bag full of them to keep the units operating out in the field.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

The orbits of the GPS satellites are arranged so that there are at least four satellites visible at any given time anywhere on earth, which is important because your GPS receiver needs to receive the signals from at least four satellites to calculate your precise position on the earth's surface.

The GPS satellites transmit information about their location and the time (which is measured with onboard atomic clocks). Those signals are picked up by your GPS receiver, which calculates its precise distance from each satellite. Armed with this information, the GPS receiver uses trilateration to calculate your position on earth. This position fix can be achieved with the signals from just three satellites, but to get a more accurate fix, as well as give you information about your altitude, your receiver needs the signal from four satellites.

As you'll no doubt be aware, the GPS signals can't be received indoors, and it takes longer to acquire a position fix if there's foliage overhead, or even on a cloudy day, but if you have a clear sky you're bound to pick up the signals from four or more satellites relatively quickly. If your device allows it, using the GLONASS network in addition to the GPS network can improve your chances of acquiring a satellite signal in unfavourable terrain. In fact, according to Garmin, "With an additional 24 satellites to utilise, GLONASS compatible receivers can acquire satellites up to 20 per cent faster than



The combo of paper maps and a GPS is AG Outdoor's recommendation.



In-dash GPS units are popular with vehicle-based adventurers.

devices that rely on GPS alone." Many devices, including a number of smartphones, such as iPhones and many Android phones, use both GLONASS and GPS.

MODERN GPS DEVICES

If you plan on using a GPS device to navigate on a remote-area trip, or in harsh terrain, then you'll need a dedicated device rather than just a smartphone. There are a number of manufacturers of said devices including Garmin, Magellan, Lowrance and DeLorme, and they make a wide range of products suited to different pursuits such as sports, outdoor adventures, off-roading and fishing.

There are several factors to take into account when selecting an appropriate-for-use GPS receiver, such as ability to withstand the elements, size and weight, screen size and resolution, battery

life (and ability to recharge the batteries), navigational and mapping features, as well as the availability of mapping software.

Most outdoors GPS receivers are loaded with a base map that will include information such as roads, lakes, rivers and points of interest. In addition, they offer the ability to view satellite imagery or upload topographic maps so you can navigate in detail. A dedicated outdoor GPS receiver will also allow you to pre-plan your trip in detail on a PC (even offering the option of a 3D view so you can zoom in and out, rotate the map and 'fly through' the terrain) and then load the information into your GPS receiver. Finally, at the end of your trip, you can download all of your data from the GPS receiver to your PC, allowing you to relive your adventure in 2D or 3D. All of the GPS receiver manufacturers have their own software so it's worth investing some time to make sure you

choose the one with the features that best suit your outdoor needs.

A favourite GPS device for Australian four-wheel drivers and tourers is the Hema Navigator, which is preloaded with all of the company's excellent 4WD maps, as well as topographic maps covering all of Australia. The easy-to-use device has a seven-inch touchscreen and it features both street and 4WD navigation.

Another alternative is to purchase Hema Explorer mapping software for use on GPS-enabled devices such as iPhones, iPads and Android phones and tablets. Offline, it includes Australia-wide 1:250k topographic maps and 1:1M Hema touring maps, has more than 40,000 points of interest for touring, camping and four-wheel driving, and allows you to navigate and record with real-time GPS tracking. Online it also features map-overlaid radar and weather forecasts, and access to shared trips through the Hema Explorer Cloud track database.

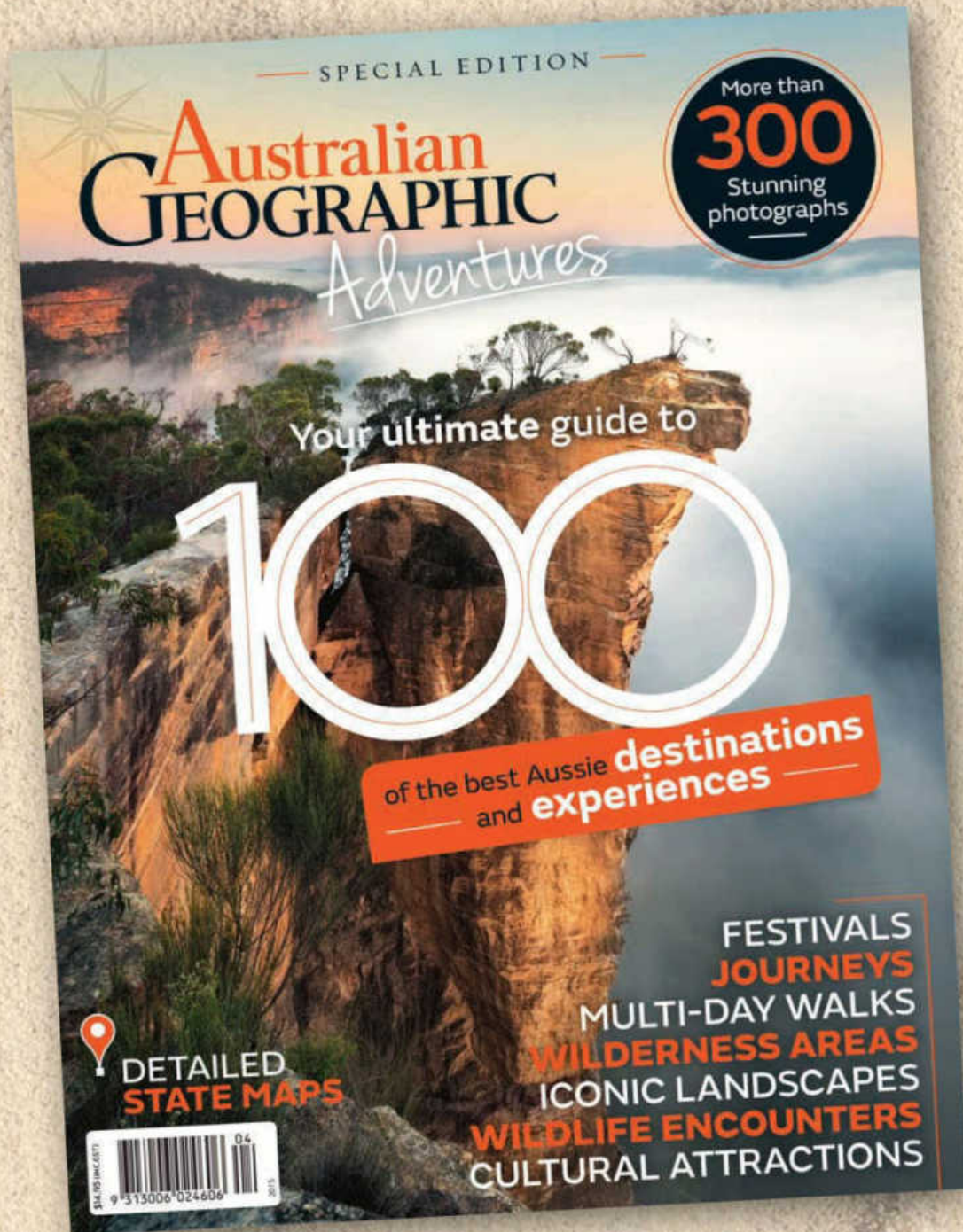
There are several other satellite navigation apps available for smartphones and tablets, all of which can turn your device into a substitute for a dedicated consumer GPS receiver, but your phone won't be nearly as robust and is not suited to extreme conditions.

The latest trend in GPS devices is the smart-watch, of which there are various styles and designs suited to different tasks such as sports and fitness, adventure activities and simple about-town navigation. Sports watches can be used like personal trip computers that record your data allowing you to calculate things like total route distance, average and maximum speed, heart rate and more. Adventure watches are designed to act like a traditional outdoor GPS receiver, and one example, the new Garmin epx, offers full-colour mapping and makes use of both the GPS and GLONASS networks. It has a 1.4-inch screen, a worldwide shaded relief base map, 8GB memory so you can upload topographic maps and satellite imagery, altimeter, barometer and compass, and it can even link to Bluetooth compatible devices so you can access email and text messages, keep an eye on the weather, relay your position to others and more.

Modern GPS receivers have come a long way in a short period of time, and outdoor enthusiasts are amongst the biggest beneficiaries of this technological progress. It wasn't that long ago that we relied solely on paper maps, magnetic compasses and rulers... can you imagine planning your trip and navigating that way these days? Remember though, if your GPS device fails in the bush, you'll still need a paper map, and just as importantly you'll need to know how to read it and how to navigate using traditional methods.

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Tested by JUSTIN WALKER

AFTER MANY, MANY years of wearing heavy-duty (and heavyweight) hiking boots on pretty much every walk, regardless of track condition, walk length (even for short hour-long jaunts), I recently took the plunge and tried out a lighter weight pair of low-cut outdoor shoes: Scarpa's new Oxygen GTX.

Scarpa is one of the most well known and highly regarded outdoor boot/shoe manufacturers on the planet; I have been a long-term wearer, with said heavy-duty hike boots, and also with climbing shoes (rock and alpine), so I was very interested in this new offering from the brand.

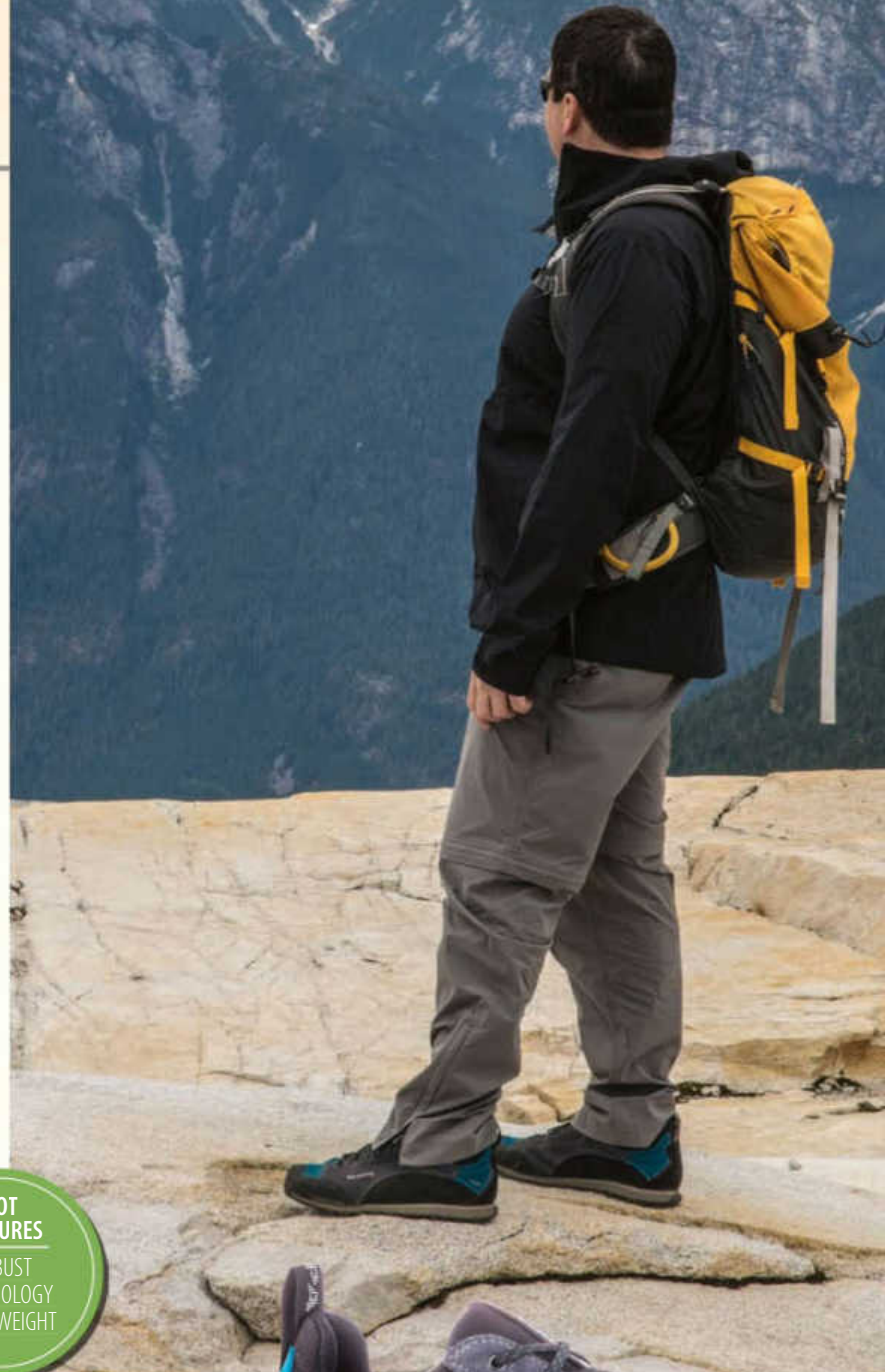
The Oxygen GTX uses Gore-Tex Surround technology to (it claims) offer improved breathability in the shoe. The technology is based around the movement of the collected inner moisture (sweat primarily) out of the shoe via a "revolutionary breathable spacer" that is located at the shoe. From this spacer, it then pushes the moisture out through the suede/mesh outer. I was initially intrigued as to how the "sweaty feet" problem of boots with waterproof/breathable layers would be addressed but this new technology did seem to provide more ventilation during the test period. This included plenty of hot/humid weather hiking over a mix of terrain surfaces and my feet stayed relatively dry. So yeah, the Surround technology sounds like sci-fi but it did seem to work.

More impressive was the shoe fit itself. The Oxygen GTX has an elastic collar which makes for a much faster wearing-in period; I received these barely three days before heading off on an 18-day Canada trip that included plenty of day hikes and scrambles over mountainous ridgelines and suffered no blisters, aches or pains. Having that little bit of "give" in the shoes definitely helped me feel comfortable in them straight away, especially combined with Scarpa's Sock-Fit DVL construction system. This is designed to adapt to

**HOT
FEATURES**
ROBUST
TECHNOLOGY
LIGHT WEIGHT

the shape of your foot to assist in minimising any potential of arch pain. Again, this all sounds super hi-tech but the proof was definitely in the fact that I never felt discomfort at any stage during the many hikes and scrambles, which meant I could just concentrate on the adventure ahead.

Over the test period I was transformed into a fan of these lightweight (440g/shoe), tough (and grippy) shoes. Scarpa promotes the Oxygen GTX as "versatile" and I agree; the only time I will reach for my heavier, high-ankle boots now, will be for a multi-day/heavy backpack expedition. For everything else, these blue-grey beauties are my first choice.





TESTED // YAKIMA SUPPUP

RRP \$229 www.yakima.com.au

TESTED BY CAROLINE PEMBERTON PHOTOS MATT DALZIEL

YOU HIT THE OPEN road, zipping along at a 100km/h hunting down your next ocean adventure and then you hear it: *slap, slap, slap...* the loose end of a ratchet strap beating wildly against the car.

After trying to ignore it, eventually the constant slapping sees you pull over to the side of the highway to locate the culprit. You eventually find it and end up tying about six grannie-knots to shorten it up, and then stuff the rest of the strap in the car door.

That's the thing with ratchet straps; they're very useful and have their place but they can be very annoying. Further, if you tighten them around your board too zealously you risk applying too much pressure and cracking your rails. Even worse, the metal clasp has a tendency to inch its way around so you've got a perfect imprint in your fibreglass. Sure, you can wrap beach towels around your boards as protection,

but they end up flapping and slapping as well.

Enter the Yakima SUPPUP, a roof-rack accessory that you can attach to your existing racks to better accommodate and transport your boards. With an inbuilt tie-down system they securely hug your boards, no matter what shape or size they are. SUPs and surfboards or a combo of both fit well. The cushioning on the rack makes for a soft landing and the optional front tie-down means the risk of it loosening itself or lifting off is non-existent.

The best thing about these racks is the folk at Yakima have thought of the little things like the nook inside the rack where you can tuck any loose ends. Viola! A super tidy, sleek, aerodynamic system with no more loose ends.

The only thing I would suggest is to the SUPPUP lockable, both on the rack and on the strap so that not only are your boards theft-proof, so is your new SUPPUP.





GEAR TEST //

LED LENSER XEO

RRP \$470 www.zenimports.com.au

Tested by AG OUTDOOR EDITOR JUSTIN WALKER

WHEN I FIRST got my hands on the LED Lenser XEO, it was with the promise that I would be super-impressed with it. I just had to dismiss the thought that it was "just another head torch" in what has become a seriously saturated market. And as has turned out, over the past four months, dismissing that thought has been very easy to do.

The LED Lenser XEO has proven to be extremely versatile. I have taken it on several overnight hikes using the supplied head-mount. I have also used it as a hand torch; mounting the light onto the battery transforms it into a great spotlight that, as my four-year-old daughter can attest, is great for spotting possums and bandicoots around our home. The 2000-lumen light output (courtesy of its dual-LED design) also assists here, providing a focused light source that has impressive reach.

Despite the amazing light output, what I rate as the standout feature of the LED Lenser XEO is Zen's Optisense technology that adjusts light output according to ambient light, courtesy of an

inbuilt sensor. When mounted on my mountain bike for (very) early morning laps of my local trails, the XEO dual LEDs can be focussed individually, so I can run one as a pencil beam and one as a spread beam, enabling me to see plenty of my peripheral area while riding off-road (I have also used it on-road as well). The top-mounted control pad makes tweaking light output easy too, with its large buttons easy to operate when you're on the bike, or when it is used as a hand-torch. It's a bit trickier when the light is mounted (via the GoPro mount-compatible system) on your helmet, but that's just a matter of getting it set up how you want before you put your tin lid on.

I wrote in my initial report that the sheer amount of lighting grunt has meant LED Lenser has had to allow for some type of cooling, and the air intake at the front of the light is designed specifically for this; I have had no overheating issues over the testing period but I do run the light at below its optimum output most of the time. The only minor issue I have with the XEO is



weight. At 478g (with battery) it is quite heavy, and this is most noticeable when mounted on your head. It's more comfortable to use the supplied extender power cable and mount the 130g light on your head while carrying the battery in your backpack/MTB pack. When the XEO is mounted on the handlebars of a MTB (this is an accessory that I would thoroughly recommend), the battery (like the light itself) is easily attached to the bike frame.

As I said in my initial review, the Led Lenser XEO is far more than just a head-torch; the versatility of this light is its main point of differentiation in the outdoor lighting market. And the fact it works equally as well whether on your head, on your MTB helmet, your bike bars or as a spotlight, makes it a firm favourite in my gear shed.



TESTED // GARMIN EPIX

RRP \$799 www.garmin.com.au

TESTED BY JUSTIN WALKER

GARMIN HAS BEEN on a roll lately with new and exciting GPS-based products seemingly hitting the market on a weekly basis. We've had months of long-term testing of the all-new Garmin fenix 3 GPS sportswatch (look for a final review in our next issue) and that has impressed all testers.

The company has not rested on the laurels of the fenix 3, it has continued to advance GPS-tech-based timepieces with the release of the epix. The epix is a GPS watch that incorporates the sports-based functionality of the fenix 3, and adds in a first-to-market, hi-res, 1.4-inch colour touchscreen for enhanced navigational function. Besides the screen, the epix includes a global base map and a one-year subscription to BirdsEye Satellite Imagery software.

The epix also features 8GB of internal memory, so you can load up additional mapping (think: Garmin's TOPO, City Navigator and BlueChart maps) to the watch, and it uses a

highly accurate EXO antenna for location, accessing both the GPS and GLONASS satellites to record your position fast. On top of all this the epix also features a built-in altimeter, barometer and a three-axis compass.

The construction of the epix is robust and comes across, initially, as slightly bulky and square-ish (bearing in mind we've been testing the more svelte fenix 3 for a few months now). But, on your wrist, that perceived size doesn't translate to weight; the epix's distinctly boxy design belies its comfort.

For anyone familiar with Garmin navigation equipment, operating the epix is a doddle. Once the satellite fix is confirmed, you can scroll through the extensive menu to access functions such as track navigation, waypoint and coordinate navigation (ideal for re-locating that remote, off-track campsite you tagged on your previous adventure), and the TracBack function.

HOT FEATURES
TOUCHSCREEN
MAPPING
VERSATILITY

Included along with the extensive navigation software suite is Garmin's excellent fitness training software. Garmin is aiming this watch at the person who only wants "one watch to do it all" and, after around four weeks of testing, we can confirm it provides that one-stop solution for any fitness enthusiast/adventurer. The touchscreen has worked surprisingly well, the battery life has been impressive (Garmin claims 50 hours in GPS mode) and the watch is bloody tough; a couple of accidental bangs, and one unintentional drop off a ledge-based campsite have had no effect on the mineral-glass lens.

At \$799, the epix isn't for everyone, but when viewed as a multiple-use timepiece – with a classy design that means it doesn't look out of place when worn with a business suit – it can be viewed as good value for the level of functionality it offers.

LONG TERM TEST //

LOWEPRO

SLINGSHOT 200

RRP \$95 (Lowepro Slingshot 202)

www.lowepro.com

TESTED BY JAMES MCCORMACK

AS AN OUTDOOR photographer, I often get asked what system I use to lug around all my camera gear when I'm out on a long-distance hike. The issue is, of course, that you're already lugging around a tent, sleeping gear, clothes, a week's worth of food, booze and three kilos of chocolate, so there's no room left for another smaller camera pack. That said, you don't want to be stuck with a tiny bag that only holds a single lens and body.

Enter Lowepro's Slingshot. I've been using the 200 for more than five years now and it's still in great condition despite the beatings it's taken. It holds a body (or two) and three to four lenses, plus other assorted goodies. A cross between a messenger bag and a small camera backpack, its true advantage is its sleek, low-profile design. This allows it to be slid into and out of your larger hiking pack with ease, as opposed to most camera bags of similar capacity that are too squat for easy removal.

It has other advantages as well, especially when you're travelling to poorer countries; it doesn't look particularly camera-baggy, which means it attracts less attention. And with the single strap design, if you find yourself in crowds or dodgy areas, it takes less than a second to swing it round to your front where you can keep an eye on it. What's more, you can then access all your gear. In fact you never need to take the Slingshot off to access anything, just swing it to the front, unzip and you're in. Seriously, it takes less than second.

The single carry strap, however, is not ideal for whole day outings. But since we're talking about using it inside a larger pack here, that's not an issue. And it'll comfortably work for an hour or so for those times you want to ditch your main pack and head off in search of different subject matter, or a better vantage point for your piccy.

Lowepro's since updated the Slingshot 200 to the Slingshot 202, but there's essentially no difference.



HOT
FEATURES

EASE OF USE
LIGHTWEIGHT
DURABILITY



shooting hand-held a little bit easier, although I still would recommend a monopod for photographing over lengthier periods of time.

On a recent trip to Canada, I used the lens with and without the EF1.4x III extender, attached to my Canon EOS 7Dmk2 and found it to be quite nicely weighted – although I did use my camera's battery handgrip accessory sometimes to offer a better balanced hold when shooting. The lens stood up to all kinds of weather conditions during this trip and proved just how valuable weather sealing is on a lens (and camera; the 7Dmk2 features extensive sealing) when I was able to stay out in inclement conditions longer than other photographers in my group, safe in the knowledge that the lens and camera wouldn't shut up shop.

The autofocus on this lens is very fast – and quiet. The old version was no slouch but this lens seems to lock on to the subject faster and stays glued to it when the subject is moving across the frame, which is perfect for wildlife, action sports and even fast-moving toddlers. The resulting images are, if exposed correctly by the shooter, invariably sharp. Again, the older version of this lens had a reputation for producing sharp images, but this new jobbie surpasses that in terms of images you would rate as keepers when it comes to sharpness.

For any Canon camera owner who is looking for a versatile, robust telephoto zoom lens, I would thoroughly recommend this one – even at this price it will definitely work out to be a bargain over undoubtedly many years of sterling service. And yes, it is relatively weighty, but then again, so are most lenses in this zoom range, although few will offer the versatility and toughness that this one does. Now I just need to start saving...

TESTED // CANON EF 100-400MM F/4.5-5.6L IS II USM

RRP \$2700 www.canon.com.au TESTED BY JUSTIN WALKER

CANON'S FIRST-GENERATION EF 100-400 L lens was renowned as a (relatively) cheap, no-nonsense, high-performance telephoto zoom lens that offered a foot in the door of close-up wildlife and action photography for many aspiring snappers. For this Canon shooter, it was always a lens to lust after; I had to rely on parental generosity to borrow my father's lens for more than a few assignments for AG Outdoor that called for a tough, reliable telephoto that offered sufficient "reach" for often small, moving subjects.

It took 16 years for Canon to release the second-gen EF100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L IS II USM lens (yep, it's a mouthful), but it was all that previous (and dare I say, patient) owners of the original lens had asked for in terms of improvements: a rotating zoom ring (rather than the old push/pull design), improved weather sealing, an upgrade to Canon's Ultrasonic Motor auto-focus (the original sported a linear-type zoom construction), fluorine coating on the rear and front lens elements, and a cool image stabilisation system that has three modes and is rated by Canon to offer a 4-stop improvement, which is very impressive.

In terms of the new IS system, Mode 1 handles stationary objects, Mode 2 is ideal for panning, and the new Mode 3 is aimed (excuse the pun) squarely at tracking action; the stabilisation is active all the time but does not come into effect until the shutter button is actually pressed. It also detects panning motion and can then adjust stabilisation to suit the direction of the moving subject. Pretty damn cool technology.

The new lens is still weighty at 1640g with the removable tripod mount (something that is unavoidable on any glass covering such a wide zoom range), but the collapsed length is less than the original, making for easier packing in your camera backpack. This shorter length makes



**HOT
FEATURES**

ROBUST BUILD
IMAGE STABILISATION
AUTOFOCUS



Atop Kala Pattar with Steve and Gyaljen (Everest is the dark peak on the left hand side).



Prayer flags, with Pumo Ri and Lingtren in the background.

Highs and Lows

Conquering Kala Pattar was a special treat for this adventurer on her birthday, but Nepal's disastrous earthquake soon had her spirits crashing back to earth

WORDS **KYLIE JARRETT** PHOTOS **KYLIE JARRETT AND STEVEN REW**

Between river and forest wildlife outings, we were chilling out at the resort called Green Park Chitwan. I laid out my mat and did yogic stretches on the verandah, surrounded by tropical flower gardens. Feeling centred after days and days of trekking, I could finally relax.

As I put my boots on to go to lunch, the ground beneath me started to shake.

The earthquake was devastating. Already a chaotic country at the best of times, Nepal is now broken. Khe garne (what is there to do)?

My nephew Steve and I trekked the Everest region just before the earthquake hit.

During acclimatisation at Namche Bazaar we hiked to the Everest View Hotel for our first glimpse of the great mountain. Highly recommended. Our guide Gyaljen Tamang was a cool dude who

seemed to know every second local on the trail, with much smiling and shaking hands.

At Tengboche Monastery we were mesmerised by morning puja. These resonant prayers of the monks are so absorbing that you forget about the cold. Hiking on, the mountain Ama Dablam came into view, along with Kantega which has a sort of hanging glacier with a blue glow. Beyond Pangboche village the juniper trees became stunted and then we were above the treeline. Did I mention it was bloody cold?

Geez there were icicles on the windows and

frozen taps and water bottles. Everyone gave way to yak trains supplying Everest Base Camp, and loads of us trekkers funnelled into the limited accommodation at Gorak Shep. The awesome spectacle of the Khumbu Glacier was before us. We saw Tibetan snowcocks and Steve practised his high-pitched universal animal call on them, 'Ergh!'

The afternoon cloud stayed down the valley beyond Dingboche. This meant we could go up Kala Pattar the same day we'd trekked from Lobuche to Gorak Shep. And it was my birthday!

Though the prayer flag-speckled top seemed so close, it took about two hours to ascend, negotiating boulders and the snow. As I stopped to pant, the mountains were clear with little hogsback clouds framed behind them. Everest Base Camp was visible below, many bright orange and yellow dots by the glacier. Gyaljen pointed out the route and how they gain the Khumbu Icefall.

Finally we got there! Jaw-droppingly spectacular – here was the brooding Everest, a.k.a. Sagarmatha and Chomolungma, encircled by a panorama of Pumori, Khumbutse, Nuptse and more. The glacial wind was strong enough to make us stagger. "You made it Phupu!" Gyaljen announced, presenting me with a kata Buddhist scarf. I was delighted – 5545m – we came all this way.

You have to accept both the good and the hard times in the mountains, but Steve and I agreed that hiking up Kala Pattar in the real High Himalaya is something we can cherish for all time.

Later at Chitwan, the earthquake was scary and interminable. Could the ground shaking and all the noise get more violent? Luckily for the people in this area, damage was not great. But my heart cries for the losses and suffering the Nepalese have experienced in this natural disaster. They are amongst the warmest people and the tourism and hospitality industries are vitally important to their country, so visitors need to keep coming.

...hiking up Kala Pattar in the real High Himalaya is something we can cherish for all time.

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10 year warranty
20 year life

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FISHING



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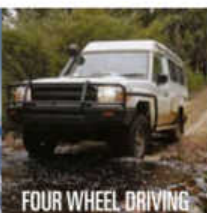
CARAVANNING



HUNTING



SNOW SPORTS



FOUR WHEEL DRIVING



JET SKIING



MOTOR CYCLING



Who: Shane Denherder
Where: Bonneville Salt Flats, Utah
Photographer: Krystle Wright
www.wrightfoto.com.au

THIS HAD THE POTENTIAL TO BE ONE OF THE MOST incredible shoots I've done. Canon Australia and National Geographic partnered up to create a TV series called *Tales By Light* where it would look at behind the scenes and what it takes to get 'The Shot.' We had encountered a few hiccups as we camped on the salt flats for a few days to shoot

paramotoring, including strong winds and a motor blow-out. But, on the final afternoon, the perfect light came into place and the images kept coming. There had been recent heavy rainfall causing flooding but the salt crystals had built up these incredible pods we flew over until the sun was well below the horizon.



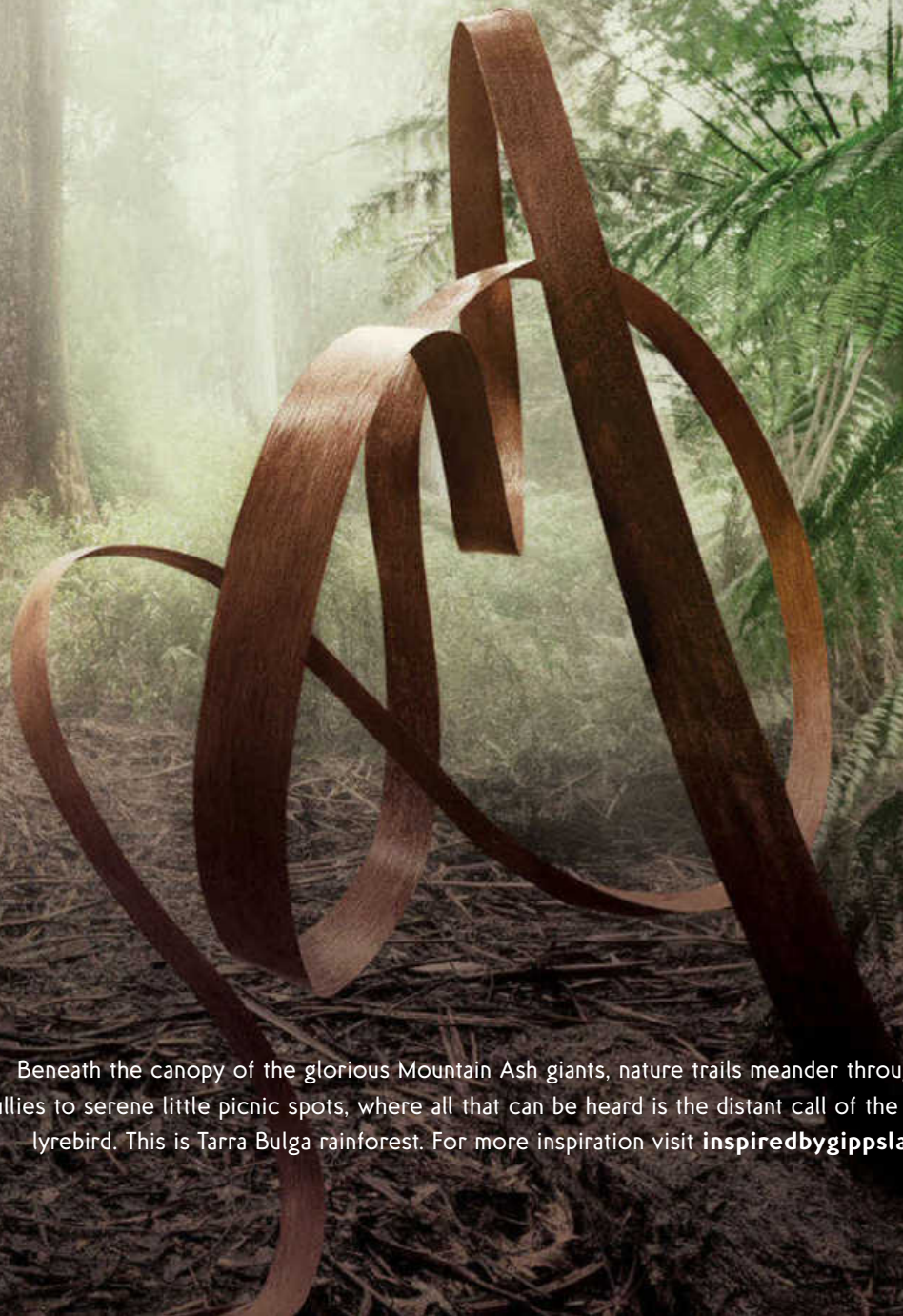
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Send it to us with "Last Shot" in the subject line to outdoor@bauer-media.com.au

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NEXT ISSUE Nov-Dec // **ON SALE** 11 November

INSPIRED BY GIPPSLAND



Beneath the canopy of the glorious Mountain Ash giants, nature trails meander through lush fern gullies to serene little picnic spots, where all that can be heard is the distant call of the elusive lyrebird. This is Tarra Bulga rainforest. For more inspiration visit inspiredbygippsland.com.au

REMOTE ADVENTURES

NEW



Dagger™ 3 Person ULTRALIGHT ROOMY HIKING TENT



106 cm



179 cm



66 cm

91.5 cm

Capacity	3 person
Total Weight	1.9 kg (Minimum Weight 1.71 kg)
On The Fly Weight	1.68 kg
Frame	1 DAC 9.0 / 9.6 mm Featherlite™ NSL
Canopy Fabric	20D Nylon Ripstop / "No-See-Um Mesh"
Fly Fabric	15D Nylon, 1200 mm
Floor Fabric	30D PU Nylon Ripstop, 3000 mm
Interior Height	107 cm
Floor Area	4 m ²
Vestibule Area	2.1 m ²
Included Accessories	Divvy™ Sac dual-stage drawstring stuff sack, Stakes, Guy-out Cord, Repair Kit



The new Divvy™ Sac dual-stage stuff sack fits the tent and poles or adjusts smaller to further compress the tent and split the load.



For hikers who's tick list for a great trip includes spacious digs, the Dagger™ 3 Person is a luxurious lightweight wilderness home for two. The Dagger™ series tents offer you the best of both worlds; they are light enough for ultralight hiking, yet roomy enough to wait out a rainstorm without feeling claustrophobic. The simple hubbed pole system maximises interior space, and the two doors and two vestibules offer easy entry and exit and plenty of gear storage.



Two doors and two generous vestibules eliminate awkward entries/exits and provide ample gear storage.



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